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HOW TO WRITE SHORT STORIES

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L. JOSEPHINE BRIDGART



1921
THE WRITER'S DIGEST
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TO DR. GEORGE PHILIP KRAPP,
of Columbia University, and Leslie
W. Quirk, whose firm hands helped me
over two stiles in my own rather venture-
some journeying, this book for the writers
who are still studying the sign-posts is
gratefully dedicated.

L. JOSEPHINE BRIDGART.

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FOREWORD

THE great purpose of "How To Write Short Stories" is to induce the new writer to look at his profession in a business-like way and to go to work with his business sense fully awake. The book also seeks to answer some specific questions which usually rise up to vex the new writer and in general to make the technique of writing for publication more clear and simple.

L. JOSEPHINE BRIDGART.

CHAPTER ONE

Common Business Sense in Viewing One's Work

WRITING for publication is a business. If the new writer will accept this fact he will have laid a foundation upon which, if he have the necessary natural ability, he can build success.

If a young woman tells you that she intends to take up nursing, and later reveals that her chief reason for doing so is that the uniforms in a certain hospital have attracted her, or that she enjoys reading to the sick, or dislikes the business life her father has suggested for her, or has heard that nurses make a great deal of money, you immediately feel that her nursing will not be a great success. You reason that nursing involves some very hard and disagreeable duties, and that a girl who thinks only of the incidental pleasures or the monetary rewards is pretty sure to fail. It is not common business sense to enter a profession without taking into consideration the requirements of that profession.

I have read this lack of common business sense between the lines of many a first story. Some of these stories tell how a young girl with no experience won a prize in a short story or novel contest; often the prize-winning story was written in an afternoon, or an evening, or in the dead of night as the result of an idea which came to

the author after she had retired. Some of these stories are about attractive young women who sold an editor a manuscript because she was attractive, or because she was poor, or because she was sick or saucy. Such stories show plainly that the authors are depending upon personal charm or "an inspiration" or luck rather than upon hard work to win acceptances. They do not stop to reason that before they can hope to sell a manuscript they must learn how to produce a manuscript that some editor will want to buy.

One would naturally suppose that a person who intended to make a business of writing English would first see to it that his English was correct, pure, idiomatic, all that is meant by "good English." As a matter of fact the necessity of reaching any standard, so far as his English goes, does not even occur to many an arrogant young writer. He may worry a little about construction and style and ask a few hurried questions about viewpoint and plot development, but the reviewing of his English grammar and rhetoric does not suggest itself to him. His manuscript may be so full of slang that a cultured English, Scotch or Irish reader could not follow it; it may again and again lapse into foreign idioms or expressions that are markedly colloquial; it may even not be correct grammatically; but if the sentences make sense (or almost sense) the writer is content. He is sure he can sell his "swell article" or "darn good yarn" if only he can find an editor not dazzled by the "big names."

In letter after letter I have had writers confess

to me that they did not want to be bothered mastering the fundamental principles of the profession they sought to enter. One man wrote me that his returned stories had been "accompanied by rejection slips with very few exceptions." "These exceptions," he explained, "have been advice to study grammar or style or something else equally obnoxious to my sense of application to dry things. I have been told that I have good ideas but rank clothing for those ideas."

A woman wrote me, complaining that I spent a great deal of time in showing her where she had broken rules and in pointing out how she could make her story more nearly perfect technically. "Why," she inquired, "do you not tell us how to make our stories salable and then help us to attain perfection afterwards?"

Story-writing and article-writing and poetry-writing are like dress-making and carpentry. They must follow certain rules if they are to attain perfect results or results that satisfy the money-spending public. Unless you follow the rules governing the construction of a table you cannot produce a table that will attract the careful buyer. Unless you respect the principles governing the construction of a story or an article or a poem you cannot produce a manuscript that the careful editor will consider worthy of a place in his magazine. In any other trade or profession, I think, the beginner expects to encounter a great deal of hard work. He expects to master certain rules, learn to apply them and then make himself skillful by practice. Believe those of

us who have tried it: Writing for publication means careful preparation and a great deal of hard work, just as millinery and surgery and sculpture do.

In her autobiography Ellen Terry tells of actresses who had explained to her that they did not care to be hampered by rules. The successful actress had replied that it was wise to learn the rules before one decided to abandon them. "Before you can be eccentric," she commented pithily, "you must know where the circle is."

It is not necessary to learn a great mass of rules in order to become a writer. It is necessary that each writer recognize the principles underlying the profession he seeks to enter. It is necessary that a writer should know how to turn out sentences that are grammatical, clear, free from crudities that would offend cultured readers. It is necessary that a writer of articles should know how to build up an article so that it will catch and hold the interest and leave the reader in no doubt as to what the author is "trying to say." It is necessary that a poem should satisfy the ear and the æsthetic taste of the reader to whom it seeks to appeal. It is necessary that a story should be so put together that it catches the interest at the outset, holds the mind alert and expectant until the climax is reached and ends with the reader more or less surprised and, intellectually at least, satisfied.

The rules which so irritate the careless writer are the result, not of arbitrary decision on the part of some over-educated rhetorician or stylist,

but principles which have been deduced from a careful study of successful writing. If my neighbor has been to Philadelphia and found he can save time by taking the Pennsylvania Railroad, and I'm in a hurry, I should be very foolish if I took the D. L. & W. or a taxicab just because the D. L. & W. station pleased my fancy better than that of the P. R. R. or I liked to travel by myself. If my brother carpenter has proved that a table will stand firm only when it is supported by four legs or what corresponds to four legs, I'm not very wise in trying to balance mine on two or three or one just because I'm too lazy to find material for four or don't particularly enjoy constructing four-legged tables.

The editor does not care at all about rules as rules. He wants a manuscript that will hold his readers' interest. If you can break the rules and still produce a manuscript that will grip the attention from the first sentence to the last you need not fear that your irregularities will cause you a rejection. If your story is interesting in the middle, but dull at the beginning and end, or catches the attention easily but cannot hold it, or catches and holds it easily but loses it just at the last—it seems good sense to try and discover whether the breaking of some rule has not spoiled the whole effect.

A thousand times I have been told that successful writers allow their viewpoint to shift about in the short story, and I have been asked why it is that all the text-books on writing declare against the shifting viewpoint. I can only reply

that the successful writers who break rules succeed, not because of their breaking rules, but because their style or their characterization or their plot material is strong enough to offset whatever may be faulty in their work. And remember that a trained writer can do with impunity what the new writer can not. If you're travelling where you know every foot of the country you may strike across fields or take some by-path and reach home safely and promptly. If you are going over unfamiliar ground it's wise to keep to the road and watch the sign-posts.

"Oh, I know my English is bum," admits one eager young writer, "and I often get the tail of my story where the head ought to be, but I can't help it! I think so fast I can't stop to watch my sentences as I go along, and I hate to rewrite a manuscript after it's all done. I'm going to have Prof. Smith revise all my stuff for me."

When I was a young girl I learned how to ride a bicycle without learning how to mount. I could manage very well if anybody would get me started, but I couldn't start myself. This proved very inconvenient; there was only one friend who was willing to bother with me, and when he wasn't at hand I had to stay home. After a while even this young man found attending to two wheels rather a burden. He bought a tandem and for several weeks I traveled far and happily. Then my friend and I quarreled and my bicycling came to an abrupt close. If you wish to write for publication learn all that is necessary to fit you for such work. The person upon whom you de-

pend for revision may quarrel with you or die or go out of business and you be left with some very promising but quite unsalable manuscripts on you hands.

I had almost headed my chapter "The Lazy Young Writer," because I have been so impressed with the fact that a great many new writers hope to succeed by some other means than their own intelligent, conscientious effort. Not long ago a woman asked me to criticise a manuscript for her and added that if I knew how she had wept and prayed for success I would speak a few encouraging words concerning her composition. I won't comment upon the lack of business sense in paying a person to tell you the truth and then trying to induce him to say more or less than the truth. I will say that a writer should be ashamed to pray for an acceptance until he has exerted all his natural and acquired powers to make his manuscript worthy of acceptance. I have a fixed belief in prayer and I daily pray for guidance in my work and courage and patience in performing my task, but I spend far more time working on my manuscripts and criticism than I do praying over them.

A bright young electrician, employed in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, told me that his superior had once pointed out a careless error with the remark: "The good Lord gave us brains and the good Lord expects us to use them!" There is sturdy faith and good common sense rather than irreverence in this speech. The good Lord has given the ambitious young writer a certain amount of

brain matter. With this He expects him to win his own success.

If you are yearning to deliver some special message, if you feel within you the cry of thoughts worthy of expression, you are worse than lazy if you allow ignorance of the rules of writing or pure carelessness to make you fail or to defer success. Don't use your God-given imagination on dreams of remarkable and impossible achievements in the realm of literature. Give up the idea of winning success by a single, brilliant effort. Hard work, guided by a knowledge of the principles of your profession, and a thoughtful study of the market will sell more manuscripts than any get-famous-quick scheme your fertile brain can possibly conceive.

CHAPTER TWO

The Necessary Mental Equipment

IN my first chapter I spoke of the necessity of every writer's understanding the principles underlying the work of authorship. I hope no person will peruse my chapter and then decide that he cannot expect to succeed because he cannot afford to go to college or take up any special course in English. If you can turn out clear, idiomatic English sentences that will stand grammatical analysis you need not fear failure because you were obliged to leave school before you could win a single diploma. A man may be a very good book-keeper and yet never have been to business college. The question is: Can he keep books satisfactorily? If he can his employer does not in the least care how he obtained his knowledge.

Some persons have a natural appreciation of the principles of style, of rhyme and meter, of construction. They read a forceful passage or a beautiful poem or a carefully built argument and they immediately appreciate the rules which govern it. They may not be able to quote any rules, but nevertheless they "sense" them and follow them faithfully in their own work. Upon how much natural appreciation of order, harmony, melody you may have depends the amount of actual study you must give to your preparation for the work of authorship.

I believe that it is possible to unfit one's self for the real business of writing for publication

by too much preparation, too much regular study. I have read articles intended for the popular magazines which would be meaningless to the average intelligent workman and the great mass of thoughtful and successful business men; and the writer hadn't the slightest intention of soaring over anybody's head. I have met university graduates who were trying to write for publications and who violated the fundamental principles of style and even the rules of grammar. I have known more than one would-be writer who seemed unable to discuss anything nearer the interests of the mass of magazine readers than such subjects as "Little Known Comedies of Shakespeare's Time" or "A Psychological Study of Charlotte Bronte." If courses in English can make a man unable to communicate with intelligent persons who have been interested in other fields of investigation, or so filled with admiration for the master pieces of literature that he forgets such commonplaces as coherence in the sentence and a pronoun must agree with its antecedent in person, number and gender, and cannot appreciate the fun and pathos and beauty about him, it may be a blessing that no course in higher English is possible for you.

A woman who has for years earned her living by literary work told me that while in college she once consulted her English instructor about some additional work in English. "You don't need more English," the instructor replied. "What you need is a broader outlook. You need experience of life."

"Oh!" exclaimed the student. Then she asked timidly, "But haven't I a broader outlook than most of the members of my class? I'm older than most of them, and I lived pretty hard between my high school and college courses. Haven't I broader outlook than most of the others?"

"A hundred times broader," the instructor replied. "I wasn't comparing you with the other members of your class but with George Eliot and other women who have succeeded as authors, the women whose profession you wish to enter. You can't become an author by just studying English."

Not long afterwards the girl was obliged to leave college, but the fact that she could not complete her English course did not worry her. The instructor had made her eager to fare forth into the world in search of that knowledge of life which, to the writer with natural ability, means material.

"But how can I tell whether I have this 'natural ability' or not?" asks a young writer. "My English is good, and I am never at a loss for words to express my thoughts. My friends enjoy my letters, and at school the teachers always praised my themes. But hundreds of other young men and women could claim as much. I love to write, but how can I know that I have the natural equipment necessary to success as an author?"

The questioner shows that she has at least one requisite in the making of a successful author, a

natural liking for the work of writing. How strong is your desire to write? Do you instinctively pick up a pad and pencil when you are free to think? Has it ever been pain to you not to be at liberty to put upon paper a thought that has just sprung up or that has been slowly developing in your busy brain? Love for the work of writing, a desire to express yourself, not in a picture or a statue or a piece of machinery, but in articles or stories or poems, this seems to me pretty sure evidence of natural ability. If you have to drive yourself to your desk I do not believe nature intended you to be a writer, no matter how correctly and pleasingly you can run words together.

What do you write when you feel you "must sit down and scribble," your own thoughts, or somebody else's? Is your desire to write a desire for self-expression or is it just a fondness for putting words and sentences together? When your religious poem is finished is it made up of scraps from familiar hymns, phrases from the Bible, a statement that appealed to you in last Sunday's sermon, or is it a bit of your own observation, your own experience, your own passionate love for God, or Christ, or the church? Is your article a careful setting forth of information gleaned from other articles or your own convictions, so strong that you had to put them in writing, whether you offered your manuscript for sale or not? Is your story life as you know life can be, or just an imitation of some story seen in print or an adaption of some play,

viewed from a comfortable seat in your favorite theatre?

In your story of sentiment are your characters the result of a study of certain combinations of defects and virtues, with power to utter a clear warning or a word of hope, or to give the reader a healthful laugh? Or are your men and women and children picked out from other stories or just attractive pictures with no life, no strength, no vivacity? In other words, have you something to say or only the power to group sentences and paragraphs into certain accepted forms.

A woman told me that she had been urged by her friends to write; they thought she had considerable talent. She then naively asked me if I would suggest something for her to write about. It is thoughts, not words and sentences, that the editors are willing to pay for. If you have nothing to write about, don't write.

A friend of mine who is very much interested in another profession than authorship told me wistfully that she envied those who could put their thoughts into lasting form. Not long afterwards a well-known magazine asked her for an article. A little later another magazine, which is working along the same lines as those my friend's profession follows, urged her to write a series of articles for its pages. She had never offered a manuscript to any periodical.

"Favored because she has a prominent position and can place several letters after her name?" No, not that. The editors have sought her out because she has thought and studied and ex-

perimented until she knows more about certain subjects than you and I do, and an article from her on one of these subjects, though her style may be inferior to ours, is worth a great deal more to the reading public than one on the same subject from you or me.

Have you discovered something that the rest of the world doesn't know? Have you seen sorrow or joy or sin or repentance as those about you have not seen it? Have you the power to find "something funny" in an experience which merely angers or depresses or bores other people? Have you anything at all to offer that can make life seem more serious, more joyous or more beautiful than it was before? Natural ability is more than the ability to express one's self easily in written words. It includes the power to find something to write about in the day's work and play, sorrow and pleasure.

To reiterate: If you have a love for writing, unusual powers of penetration or appreciation or a mass of valuable information obtained at first hand and have mastered the fundamental principles of the work of authorship you are well-equipped mentally for the business of writing for publication.

"I have appreciation," replies some young writer wistfully, "and I can talk or write fluently when I'm not vitally interested in what I'm saying. But when it comes to putting my deeper self, my highest thought into black and white I'm stricken powerless. I can write only what seems to me not worth printing."

I once heard a story about a young man who wanted to take up a study of the piano. The teacher to whom he applied for instruction gave him a piano stool, sat down beside him and called his attention to the key-board. "This," explained the teacher, indicating the middle c, "is c. We may find all the other keys by this. The one immediately below is b, the one below that is a. The one next above is d, the next e, and so on up to g."

"I see," replied the pupil respectfully. "Now let's play the Moonlight Sonata!"

It takes practice as well as natural ability and a knowledge of the rules to play Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata. It takes practice as well as a knowledge of the English language and natural ability to produce a group of high-grade poems or articles or stories. Don't decide that you have not the necessary natural equipment and can never succeed in the profession of authorship because you can't write an epic or a masterpiece of fiction at the very beginning of your literary career.

CHAPTER THREE

The Finding of Time and Material

A GAIN and again I have met sentences like this in letters accompanying manuscripts submitted for criticism: "I have little time to write, being a busy housewife." "Unfortunately I am obliged to stand behind a counter ten hours a day." "I hope some time to be out of the factory and free to follow the profession of authorship." Often the writers hint that success would have come to them long ago, had they had time to go out and invite it. I know that hundreds of men and women feel that if they could only spend all their time writing they would be blessed indeed.

A man who has earned thousands of dollars writing for publication and who is selling books regularly told me that he believed it easier to get a start as an author if you had to earn your own living. "I've known a number of young men," he said, "who have thrown up their positions in order to have more time to write, and each one has told me that as soon as he gave up his regular work the ideas that had been clamoring for expression began to slink away. Each man confessed that when he had nothing to do but write he seemed to have nothing to say."

Of course after a writer has won distinct success and his desire is wholly toward the profession of authorship he would be very foolish to

keep himself to uncongenial employment for fear freedom would mean a dearth of ideas. It is the beginner, who must live awhile before he can have very much to say, who is mistaken in supposing that he could profitably put in five or seven hours a day writing. But even the successful writers, I believe, feel the need of some less exalted task to enable them to do their best work in the line of authorship. Longfellow, whom we might think could work best if his thoughts were always on the heights, wrote:

"The everyday cares and duties, which men call drudgery, are the weights and counterpoises of the clock of time, giving its pendulum a true vibration and its hands a regular motion; and when they cease to hang from the wheels, the pendulum no longer swings, the hands no longer move, the clock stands still."

Longfellow's experience seems to confirm the statement of the vigorous young prose writer who is a part of the rushing literary life of the twentieth century.

You have to cook, nurse babies, "bang on a typewriter," oversee a camp of rough wood-choppers when you long to write. If to write is your peculiar gift you will be given time. While you are waiting you are living. And life means material.

In proof of what I say let me give some extracts from the history of a present-day writer: She studied English in high school and was told that she had unusual talent. Before she went to college she sold some little sketches to her home

newspaper; they were sketches depicting life in the town and pleased the readers of the town paper; the editor had known that they would and this is why he bought them. They did not deal with life outside the girl's small world. While in college she tried to secure some vacation work and was impressed by the "wants" in the newspaper and the human nature back of them. She wrote an article about the "want column" and sold it to a small magazine. Then she was taken ill and her physician not only ordered her out of college but insisted that she do no more literary work for several months. He sent her away to a tiny little village hundreds of miles from New York.

The girl obeyed the command to rest but as soon as she was herself again she wrote an article, showing the little village as it had looked to her, coming fresh from New York, and she sold her manuscript to the Magazine Supplement of a New York newspaper. Before she could get back to her own work she was called to go to a college town and nurse a sick sister. She had no time to write while there but the contrast between the old conservative town and the college life within it gave her an idea for another sketch. Later she wrote the sketch and sold it to a New York magazine.

She fell sick again and another period of inaction followed. Then the physician suggested her taking up stenography and typewriting just because her active brain demanded exercise and she seemed unable to stand the nervous strain of

literary work or study which led to it. So she took up stenography. The new line of thought and the entirely fresh atmosphere of a business school worked wonders with her physically, and before she realized what she was doing she was planning a story about a boy stenographer. She had it all done but the final copying when she secured her first position.

The position was with a magazine editor, and that heartened her a good deal, but the regular hours and steady work were hard after the habit of semi-invalidism, and even with her new strength she did not dare do any further writing at home. She tried to be the very best stenographer she could. But one day the editor of the Children's Page said to her, "Do you happen to have a child's story I could examine? I want just a little story for the very little folks. I know you did some writing before you came to us. Have you a child's story?"

Had she? Yes, a little story that had been carefully written, rejected by two or three juvenile magazines and then put away until she could decide what to do with it. She brought it to the office the next day and showed it to the editor.

"Good," commented the editor, "up to here. I don't see why you added this last part. There's a good climax right here, and it ends a story of just the length I want. May I cut it off here?"

The stenographer knew why she had added the last part, but she saw the good climax, with the editor's pencil pointing it out, and she agreed with a singing heart to sell the story in its cur-

tailed form. A little later she took out the boys' story, copied it in as plain long-hand as she could compass and sent it to the *Youth's Companion*, which promptly mailed her a check for thirty-five dollars.

Then the magazine failed and she was obliged to take another position, with a drug house. One day the head chemist and a salesman had a quarrel, after which the chemist went about his duties, irritated and depressed. The girl laughed at him and just to cheer him up sat down on a box in the laboratory and wrote a poem about the pharmaceutical salesman. She had not thought of producing anything for publication, but the chemist seemed to enjoy her effort so much that she typewrote it and sent it to a pharmaceutical journal. It sold.

The foregoing is enough to show how interest in the present task, combined with a love for writing and natural ability, may mean progress even though the disappointed writer feels he is standing still or going backwards. The woman whose experience I have been discussing finally found herself stenographer to the editor of a small magazine. She did not talk to him about her literary aspiration or thwarted hopes, but he very soon discovered that she could turn out clear, correct letters and had good literary judgment. Without her asking for any promotion or expecting one he offered her the position of associate editor on his magazine. Today she has a peculiarly pleasant editorial position which gives her time for private writing. She has sold to a long

list of periodicals and has a successful book to her credit. In her productions can be found the material which came to her through pain and weakness and grievous disappointments.

If you are well and strong and have an income which involves no work on your part or a father able and willing to support you, your life may seem to you so smooth, so "ordinary" that it is barren of material. Writers have produced masterpieces while living quiet, conventional lives, but it takes unusual natural ability to see a book in such material as makes up Barrie's *Auld Licht Idylls* or Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, just as it takes unusual natural ability to see a modish gown in two plain, old-fashioned garments or an attractive dwelling in an ordinary big barn. Unless a writer has unusual talent he needs more striking material than a heavy snow-storm or an engagement broken because of a parent's or guardian's disapproval to enable him to produce an appealing sketch or novel.

If your own life is uneventful that of those about you is not. There is valuable information hidden away in your neighbor's brain. There are tragedies and comedies being enacted not very far from your own door. Don't sit in your study with your mind as blank as the sheets of paper before you. Tear up the regret you wrote a few minutes ago and "accept with pleasure" the invitation to one of Mrs. A's *impossible* dinners. Tell Mr. B. you've changed your mind and would like to accompany him to his employes' annual frolic. Ask the mother of the little curly-head

across the street if you can't go with him to his kindergarten some morning. Let old Dr. D. tell you the story you were at such pains to stave off the last time you met him. Don't do these things with the idea of making "copy" of your friends and neighbors but in the hope of seeing life from new points of view. Sympathy, the power to see life as it looks to "the other fellow," even when he is your opponent or detractor, is a key to vast stores of material.

I once heard an editor accept a manuscript with the remark: "Yes, I want it. It's all right! You see more than most people. Many a writer would have gone up there where you've been and not found a thing worth writing about!"

Get something for yourself out of each acquaintance and each experience and you'll soon find you have plenty of good material. But don't go through life as some people go through Europe or college, so busy taking notes that all you've gained is in your note-book. You can't get into sympathy with a phase of life by squinting at it through an eye-glass. "More life and fuller" is what the writers should crave.

Of course a note-book has its place. A writer so fortunate as to possess a vest-pocket would be very foolish not to carry about with him a note-book into which he can put ideas that come to him by the way and seem as eager to go as they were to come. But don't be so busy taking notes on life that you lose opportunities to live.

Remember, too, that no person can be always working and not give out. I once asked a phy-

sician if he would have thought a certain girl nervous if he had met her socially instead of professionally. He replied that he did not allow himself to think of the physical condition of the people he met non-professionally; that he found he must have some time free from professional cares if he would retain his health. Writers are usually high-strung. They need time that is free from work just as surely as mechanics and teachers and physicians do.

Don't go to bed with a pencil in your hand and a note-book under your pillow and the electric switch so arranged that you can get light instantly in case an idea comes to you in the night. A rested body is quite as important as a well-stocked mind, when one is making a business and not a pastime of writing.

A little of my own early experience may be a help to the brand-new writer who is still wondering where authors find their material. The first article I remember writing was a little sketch about correspondence. I had been struck with the fact that a great many people never really reply to a letter and that corresponding with them is a good deal like a German who can't understand French trying to talk to a Frenchman who refuses to speak German. I wrote out my thoughts under the heading, "Answer your Letters," and sold my manuscript to *Kate Fied's Washington*, a bright little magazine which many readers will remember. I'm afraid no other check, however generous, will ever give me such exquisite joy as that first one, for three dollars.

I had commented to a friend on the coincidence of a tradesman's name suggesting his business. Mr. Sweet kept a candy store and Mr. Stiff was an undertaker. Suddenly the idea of jotting down such coincidences and making an article about them occurred to me. I gathered all the material in or near my own city, Jersey City, and the *Jersey City Journal* gladly accepted and paid for my contribution.

Later I happened to hear news of some of my old high-school mates who were making a success in the world outside of Jersey City. I wrote another article on "What Becomes of our High School Graduates" and the Journal bought that also. In both of these sketches I had (unconsciously, I think) respected the truth that a man likes to see his own name and his neighbor's in print and has a kindly interest in those who are or have been his friends and neighbors. *Gossip* in its broader sense is easy to sell.

For what seemed to me "good and sufficient reasons" I took up stenography. It was through my knowledge of stenography that I obtained a position as "editorial assistant" on a household journal. When I had been in my position a very few months the art editor (a very young man, by the way) said to me: "You can't fool us! We know you didn't come here to be a stenographer but because you wanted material. I know you've got poems and stories up your sleeve!"

Whether he was right or not I won't say but I did gain a great deal of material in that office, besides a knowledge of proof-reading and a cer-

tain insight into an editor's needs and problems which stood me in good stead later on. And my study of stenography gave me one bit of "copy" that I certainly could not possibly have obtained without it.

One noon-time the stenographer for the business manager of my magazine showed me a poem about a new stenographer's mistakes, and we laughed over it together. A little later a cousin of mine who was traveling in England and who thought my business course rather a joke cut the same poem from an English paper and sent it to me. Some months later I was talking to a man who wanted me to help him out while his stenographer was having her vacation and he showed me the same poem. It had evidently pleased the editors and been copied from periodical to periodical.

I told the amused employer that the dictator was sometimes quite as unsatisfactory as the stenographer, and we had a good-humored argument about the matter. On my way home I conceived the idea of answering the poem and before I left the train I had my lines pretty clearly worked out. At first I had no other thought than amusing myself and the man who had showed me the first poem, but by the time I had my production polished and copied I had decided to try and sell it. I traced the offending poem back to a western Sunday newspaper and submitted my manuscript to this. An early mail brought me a letter from the editor, accepting the poem and asking for my picture. He said he

wanted to reprint the first poem with mine and a picture of the author of the first poem and one of me. This was rather more publicity than I cared for, so the page was illustrated with two pen and ink sketches, one a carefully dressed, business-like man dictating to a dreadful, frowsy girl and the other an attractive, business-like girl taking dictation from an ineffective-looking fellow who was smoking and slouching in his chair. The poem was signed with a *nom de plume*, which the editor had chosen for me, apparently with the idea of allowing me to keep my name as sacred as I held my countenance.

The thought I wish to bring out is that almost any experience which gives you a new glimpse of life may yield you material for a manuscript. Don't feel that a "little" sketch or poem or story isn't worth writing. It isn't good common sense to try and build a house before you've demonstrated you can make a good chicken-coop. It isn't wise to begin poetry writing with a sonnet or prose writing with a drama. Just how you begin must of course be largely governed by your age, education and the opportunities you have had for mental and spiritual development, but I think it's a safe general rule to let your material be your guide. If you use the "little" ideas well the big ideas will be more likely to seek you out.

A college student chose for his motto: "Seeking earnestly after the truth do day by day the truth you have." A good motto for the new writer would be: *Seeking earnestly after the best material let me use as best I know how the material I already have.*

CHAPTER FOUR

Hints for Equipping the Shop

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TO judge by myself and some other writers I have had opportunity to observe, writers are not always naturally methodical. The young writer is apt to pride himself on his littered desk and does not at all mind confessing that he has a valuable memorandum or outline "somewhere," but *can't for the life of him find it!* Because a man is not naturally methodical is not a good reason why he should cultivate disorderly habits. Time is precious and it behooves none of us to waste it. It is not good business sense to strew your tools about and have no regular place for your material. If you are orderly in your habits in the very beginning you will save yourself a great deal of irritation and nervous wear in the days to follow, when you have come to feel that every minute is valuable.

"I think," wrote a correspondent, "that I sent this story to *Collier's*, but it's so long ago I'm not sure."

Another writer sent a magazine with which I was connected a vigorous protest against its having *filed the child of her brain, ticketed it like hundreds of other manuscripts!* She then calmed down sufficiently to add that she could not remember the title of her manuscript. She had sent her precious child on a long journey and had

neglected to write down its name and destination and the date it left her!

Some months ago I wrote an article on a subject in which only a few magazines are interested. I made myself a list of possible markets and then, after talking the matter over with a literary friend, I picked up my manuscript record and jotted down the names of three magazines he wished me to try. To one of these my article seemed peculiarly suited. Now a manuscript record is not intended for lists of possible markets but for the names of periodicals to which manuscripts are actually sent. Soon after I made my entry I became so engrossed with my criticism work that I had no time to think of the article. A recent event has made it timely. But my manuscript record shows the names of three markets, without dates, and after the market I am most anxious to try there is a question mark. Did I try any of the three? Did I learn any fact after talking with my friend that made me doubt the wisdom of trying this particular market or does my question mark mean that I didn't know whether I tried it or not? I can't tell and because I can't tell I may lose a sale. I don't just like to send an editor an article I may have already sent him and had returned to me as unavailable for his magazine. Usually my record is clear and accurate but by this one irregularity I have caused myself a good deal of annoyance and perhaps a definite loss.

If you have only written one manuscript for publication begin a manuscript record. You can

buy a book prepared expressly for the use of writers or you can use a blank-book you happen to have at hand. Whatever you use be neat and orderly in your entries. Have spaces for the title of your manuscript, the magazines to which it is sent, the date it is mailed, the date it is rejected or accepted and extracts from any personal letters you may receive concerning it.

The extracts from personal letters are a help in determining the needs of the editors from whom they emanate, and they also have the power to cheer the writer with the thought that he "almost made" a magazine he hopes to satisfy some day.

Every writer needs a book of markets. There is, of course, a good printed list of markets which can be bought for \$2.50, but, to some beginners \$2.50 would seem a large sum and as such a book can have no interest for the non-writing members of a family the thoughtful young writer may hesitate to accept so much from the over-taxed family treasury. If so, he can make himself a very helpful list of markets by the exercise of some thought and ingenuity.

In almost every home there are three or four good magazines. Get a square note-book of large size, preferably a loose-leaf note-book, and divide it up so that your entries will follow the order of the alphabet. Near the end of each year the magazines make announcements, showing what they intend to offer for the following year. Cut out these announcements or as much of them as seems to indicate what will be bought by each

magazine the coming year or the general policy followed. Make some long-hand or typewritten notes from your observations, such as follows:

Uses five short stories (from 2,000 to 3,500 words) each issue; one article (sometimes serious, sometimes humorous); one poem (any type but religious). Seems to avoid tragedy in fiction. Editors evidently against woman's suffrage. Apparently likes stories about (not for) children.

Borrow the magazines in your friends' homes and study them. Go over those to be found in the public libraries in your vicinity. Look over the table of contents on the cover page of the magazines displayed on the news-stands. If you hear that any periodical is offering sample copies free send for one. Grasp every opportunity that presents itself to gain an insight into the policies of the magazines you would like to please and of the magazines which can be a help to you in climbing to these.

If the periodicals to which you intend to submit manuscripts print editorials study these diligently. In a note-book such as I have suggested I find this:

The editors are (1) advocating frankness with the child concerning sex relations; (2) fighting the use of aigrettes and Paradise plumes in women's hats; (3) advocating American designs in place of those from Paris; (4) never scoff at religion and often print articles with broad religious teaching.

After reading such a note I shall not make the mistake of sending the magazine discussed a story in which a lovely and loving mother tells her

little boy of the stork which brought his small sister, or one about a girl who longed for a Paradise plume and earned one by patience and industry. I might, on the other hand, see just where to offer my article on "The Bad Boy's Influence in One School and How it was Counteracted" or my story about a bishop who was Christlike rather than orthodox.

More lengthy notes than are possible in your manuscript record should be taken from the editors' personal letters and entered in your book of markets. Note the following:

"We are avoiding foot-ball stories this year. So many accidents have occurred in the recent big games that the parents are asking us not to fan the interest in foot-ball."

Such a letter yields you the memorandum:

No foot-ball stories in——(the year.)

"We receive too many serious stories. We want our pages to be helpful and uplifting but we want them to be entertaining and cheering. Can't you let us see another of your rough-and-tumble tales?"

Your book of markets receives the hint: Uses occasional "rough-and-tumble" stories.

A magazine like the *Literary Digest* or *Current Opinion* will afford you a great deal of information. These magazines buy no manuscripts but they quote from a great many periodicals that do and enable the writer to keep in fairly close touch with what the editors and publishing houses are doing. Indeed, there are a great many ways besides those I have suggested by which the alert

young writer can obtain a knowledge of that very important factor in his business, the literary market.

Besides the envelopes for sending out his manuscripts and for the editors' convenience in returning them if they prove unavailable, the writer needs some envelopes for his carbon copies or the long-hand copies which he retains for himself.

When you finish an article place your carbon copy in an envelope bearing the title and file under "Carbons of Unsold Manuscripts" so that you will have no difficulty in finding it should your submitted manuscript be lost in the mails. When the manuscript is sold mark on the envelope, "Sold to——," and refile under "Carbons of Sold Manuscripts."

It is a good plan to place in the envelope with the carbon copy of an unsold manuscript all the personal letters received about it. A perusal of these personal letters will help you to determine whether your list of markets or the manuscript itself is to blame for your rejections.

Have a letter-file or some definite place for your personal letters from editors. If you follow the plan suggested in the preceding paragraph your file will hold only acceptances and letters regarding rejected manuscripts which sold later. But whatever method you adopt be sure to know where to find every note which may possibly help you in marketing manuscripts or which offers suggestions worth heeding in further work.

Every writer needs some device for picking

up and hoarding material. A note-book (preferably loose-leaf) is of course the best for the author who gathers his notes as he moves about a factory or store or travels from place to place. A plan which suits my own needs is a basket containing long envelopes marked with the subjects which interest me generally or some specific plot or idea for an article that I happen to have in mind. If a thought comes to me I jot it down on any scrap of paper that happens to be at hand and thrust it into the proper envelope. I have one envelope marked simply "Ideas" into which goes any miscellaneous idea that I think I may some day have a use for. Then when I am ready to begin the story or article I have planned I sit down with my scraps of paper and my memory is refreshed and my purpose is strengthened as I go over the thoughts which came to me while I was busy with other matters.

If you do much writing you will find that you use a great many pads and your family will have it against you that you "waste reams of paper." See if some business friend won't let you have the defective or "spoiled" sheets that would otherwise go into the waste-basket. Perhaps in the attic there is a pile of letter-heads, left from some abandoned business or discarded because of a change of address. Capture these and use the blank sides of your good copies. A little neat printing on the back of a sheet does not annoy the editor in the least. Perhaps you may also be fortunate enough to find some envelopes which will hold your sheets when folded twice and

which with only the blocking out of the address in the upper left-hand corner will serve to carry your manuscripts safely to and from the editorial offices.

In the matter of stamps I'm afraid I can't offer any suggestion that will enable the new writer to begin business without an outlay. When I was a little girl I used occasionally to buy a stamp from a German grocer, whose store was very many blocks nearer my home than any Post Office station. One day he showed me a sheet of stamps, worth probably two dollars, and told me it had cost him five cents. To my exclamation and remark that my father had told me it didn't matter how many stamps you bought each one would cost two cents he replied, smiling, "Oh I was just trying to open your heart a little!"

"Open your heart" was a new expression to me, but after a day or two I worked out the conclusion that the grocer was trying to show me that I was imposing on him by asking him to come out of his retreat back of the store and hand me a stamp. A good many times since I've wished I knew a place where I really could buy a big sheet of stamps for five cents! But though we writers are such faithful patrons of his, Uncle Sam still insists that we have no special rates, and as long as he is the only fellow in the business of carrying manuscripts we'll have to accept his services at his own terms.

CHAPTER FIVE

Common Business Sense in Meeting the Market

IF you are a business man and are handed the card of some person you have never seen and asked to give him a few minutes of your time and you go to the room where callers wait and find two men you instantly know which one you prefer to talk to. Without consciously thinking about the matter you are annoyed when the carefully dressed, bright-faced fellow keeps his seat and the slouchy man with a spot on his collar comes forward to meet you. Moreover, if you accost the carefully dressed caller and he replies with a smile that is courteous rather than familiar that he is waiting for Mr. Somebody Else your sense of preference deepens, even before the slouchy man has shown his bad breeding by talking too loudly or making a suggestion which should have been left to you or disgusted you by his obsequiousness.

When a manuscript goes seeking an interview it should be correct in appearance and its manner of presenting itself. It is discourteous to send out a manuscript that is soiled or which has been corrected until it is hard to follow. It is bad taste to tell the editor about your family affairs when you are submitting a manuscript for sale. It is bad manners to suggest that your article or poem or story is better than anything he has yet

published. It is not good business sense to be discourteous, whether you are trying to sell an automobile or a manuscript.

It was once my task to see that the manuscripts rejected by a certain magazine were returned to their owners. Those that were beautifully clean, folded just right to fit their return envelopes and slipped into the slot of the mail chute without protest always left my hands with regret while those that were untidy or awkward to handle were disposed of with a sigh of relief. I dare say the editors who read them as well as handled them shared my feelings. Indeed, I once heard an editor say that manuscript readers were only human and could not help being attracted or repelled by a manuscript because of its appearance. Yet despite the fact that article after article and chapter after chapter has been written, explaining just how to prepare manuscripts for publication, there are still writers who roll their manuscripts, use note-books that are awkward to handle and heavy to hold, send return envelopes that could not possibly contain the manuscripts they accompany or in some other way cause unnecessary trouble in the editorial office.

I have examined manuscripts filled with small errors which the writers frankly acknowledged and half promised to eliminate when they had more time. These manuscripts had evidently been interviewing editors just as they reached me. How long would it take you to send back a filing-cabinet that was delivered to you with the wood unpolished? How long would you employ

a dress-maker who sent your gowns home with the bastings still in and the seams unpressed?

It is not good business sense (1) to make your manuscript into a package so thin and flat that it is liable to be bent or broken in the mails; (2) expect the editor to pay postage before he can secure your manuscript from the Post Office; (3) fasten a stamp to your manuscript when you know a detached stamp leaves a soiled spot behind it and is awkward to use again; (4) use paper which will tire the editor's eyes and make him anxious to lay your manuscript aside; (5) ask the editor to provide you with a return envelope; (6) expect the editor to do some of the work which you hope to induce him to pay you for doing.

The courteous, business-like manuscript appears before the editor, correct, clean and fresh and with just a brief note, stating that it is offered for publication at the editor's regular rates, with once in a while some such addition as the following:

"As my story involves a knowledge of engineering I had it read by my friend, Professor A. T. Symthe, of the.....School of Mines. He permits me to use his name in connection with the statement that the story is correct and plausible, considered from the engineer's point of view."

"I lived in Norway for ten years and know the peasant life there."

"As I make some rather startling statements in regard to the cruelty of certain well-known companies you may wish a reference as to my reliability. I refer you to Mr. Alfred Thompson, of the S. P. C. A., in, who will be glad to vouch for me and my investigations."

"My name is doubtless unfamiliar to you. Until recently I have used the *nom de plume*, I have been a contributor to.....under this name for the past two years."

After you have begun to succeed the editor may write you kindly, interesting letters, which warrant you in abandoning your formal tone in submitting further work, but it's good business sense to let the editor be the one to drop the bars.

A physician told me that he liked to place orders through a certain salesman because he knew enough not to waste a patron's time. "If I snap out, 'Nothing today!' he withdraws with only a courteous bow," the doctor explained. "He has sense enough to see I'm not cross, but just busy." I wish I could convince some of the new writers that it's not good business sense to waste the editor's time when submitting manuscripts for sale.

In marketing manuscripts let your attitude be that of the well-bred, well-trained salesman who believes in the thing he has to sell and who expects to sell it for no other reason than that it is good of its kind and well adapted to the needs of the customer.

An editor told me that she dreaded Christmas time because her mail brought her so many pitiful letters. It is not good business sense to ask an editor to take your manuscript because you need money. If you intended to open a store you would not want to buy certain property because the man who owned it needed the money he had invested in it. You would think it only fair that you be left free to select a building that was well

heated and well lighted, convenient to the patrons you hoped to hold or to win, in all respects adapted to your business. You haven't a great deal of patience with the robust young man who tries to sell you poor needles or carbon paper because he has "a sick wife and three small children at home." Would you really want the editor to accept an article or story or poem of yours just because he felt sorry for you? If so, you are not an artist and not a workman entitled to the respect of your fellows. You are rather a beggar, ashamed to confess that you are a beggar and hiding under the garb of an honest toiler.

In my correspondence with new writers I have been struck by the fact that a great many of them are not interested in the question of how to write what will sell. They want to know how they can sell what they write.

"I know my manuscript is still faulty," writes one, "but I've worked on it until I'm sick of it. Can't you help me to sell it just as it is?"

"I know there isn't much demand for this kind of thing," says another, "but I do love to dabble in psychology! Don't you know of some magazine that could use my manuscript?"

"I know these sketches are not exactly what the editors are looking for," admits a third; "they were written for a club to which I belong. But I'd like to sell them if I could."

The successful farmer doesn't take his one pound chickens to market because he's tired of fussing with the scrawny little things. He doesn't raise sunflowers because they please his æsthetic taste and then expect to sell them. He doesn't

cover his fences with sweet-smelling wild grapevines and then as an after-thought try to sell the grapes. Except in his kitchen-garden, where he grows what he likes, or what his wife likes, he raises that which the green-grocers and housewives who are his customers have shown themselves willing to buy. He doesn't raise pigs because he likes pigs but because pigs will sell and bring in a good return for the time and money invested in them.

It is not good business sense to offer for sale that which is inferior or which has not yet matured. It is not good business sense to offer for sale that for which there is no demand, unless, of course, your product is so excellent and so tempting that it creates its own demand. It is not good business sense to offer as a specimen of your wares a product which just happened to grow in your garden or your brain or which was produced for some entirely different purpose than satisfying the demands of the market.

A study of two or three copies or even of one copy of a magazine will give you a very fair idea of what the editor of that magazine is buying. A study of three or four magazines of the type you wish to please will give you a very fair idea of the kinds of manuscripts this type of magazine buys. If you like to write allegories, monologues, poems of from 200 to 2,000 lines, essays on such general and over-worked topics as "childhood" or "a mother's influence" there is no reason why you should not employ yourself in this way. But if the magazines you wish to please use only short

stories, poems of from four to thirty-two lines and articles on current topics it is not good business sense to send them these manuscripts which it so pleased you to write.

As a good general rule it is best for the new writer to put his thoughts into one of three forms, into a short story, an article or a poem, taking care that no story runs over 5,000 words, no article over 3500 words and no poem over thirty-two lines. Until you have created a demand for your work it is wise to produce that for which there is the largest market. I believe that many a manuscript is returned to the author unread because the editor sees at a glance that, however good it may be, it is too long for his periodical or is in a form which is excluded by his policy.

As a second rule I suggest: Be guided by your temperament, your training and your experience of life. I once saw an editor fling down a manuscript with the exclamation: "I wonder why people who have never been to New York will persist in laying their scenes there! 'The Metropolitan Opera House was crowded to the doors!' I hadn't read a page before I knew that girl had never been inside the Metropolitan Opera House in her life." Life in the little hamlet or village you know so well may have far more charm for the New York reader than the rush and rivalry of a big city. The city, which you do not know, appeals to you because you do not know it. The village, which the city reader can never know as you do, may charm him for this very reason. At any rate you cannot succeed if you persist in

depicting that which you yourself have never been in a position to appreciate.

My third rule follows naturally after the second: Be sincere. I have read manuscripts which showed plainly that they were written by beginners and yet they were so sincere, so conscientious in presenting what the writers believed to be the truth, so free from the affectation of discussing that which the writers admired but did not know that they awakened both respect and confidence. And I have read others that affected me like an insincere compliment or a patch of rouge.

It is insincere to try and play upon the reader's sympathies by depicting sorrows which you have no reason to believe ever existed or could exist. For example, it seems to me insincere to show a virtuous and refined young woman who must choose between seeing her baby starve or going on the street and using what remains of her physical charm to attract some dissolute fellow with money in his pockets. Where are the Salvation Army stations? Where are the college settlements? Where are the kindly priests and clergymen who are making a business of helping God's poor? Where, indeed, are the generous poor themselves that such an outrage as this is necessary.

A nurse from one of the New York Settlement homes told me that she once went to a tenement to prepare a patient for transportation to the hospital and found the woman with absolutely no clothes fit to put on. The room in which she lay was so dark that they had to have a light, though

it was only two o'clock in the afternoon. The neighbors were not much better off than the patient, but they eagerly ran to their own poor quarters and gathered up the best they had and soon the woman was in a clean night-dress with a decent dressing-gown about her.

"But she can't go without stockings," protested the nurse. "She must have something on her feet."

The women looked at one another. It was clear that no one had a whole pair of stockings among her clean clothes. As the nurse pondered one of the women suddenly sat down on the floor, took off her shoes and quickly stripped her feet of what was evidently the only pair of presentable stockings she had in the world.

That was real New York. Doesn't it sound as though a girl could get a bit of bread for herself and milk for her child without imperiling her soul? There is plenty of pathos about us without our manufacturing it, and plenty of humor and other story material. It is not good business sense to manufacture that which can be had by simply picking it up as it lies at your feet, especially when the natural product sells so much more readily and so much higher up than the manufactured.

My last rule is: Think occasionally of the individual editor and his desire to please the reading public as well as of yourself and your desire to sell your manuscripts. There are few men, I think, able to withstand the lure of being understood.

I once had an editorial position with a house that printed a technical magazine and published a few books in line with the magazine. We kept some sample copies in our outer office and took subscriptions and sold books there. I was intensely interested in the magazine and thought the books the best of their kind on the market. When patrons dropped into the office they very often told me a little about their work, and I showed them the books and explained the scope of the magazine. But selling books and taking subscriptions were not my particular duties and my superior complained that I spent too much time talking to patrons and banished me to a little office of my own in another building.

About six months later he said to me: "Do you know, we take in very little money at the office since you've been over here? I guess it pays to spend time talking to visitors after all!"

Now I hadn't had any experience in selling subscriptions and books and, indeed, had not tried to sell any. My success lay in the fact that I was able to get into sympathy with the people who came to the office and as at the same time I believed our books and magazines were just what they needed I was able to secure their subscriptions and sell them books. While I was talking to a patron I was more interested in him or her than in our publishing business.

If you can get into sympathy with the editor's needs and difficulties and at the same time have something in your brain or your desk that could be of definite service to him it will not be a very

hard matter to induce him to buy your manuscripts. But the understanding is a necessity. The editor won't change his policy for you, no matter how he may rate your work. The best salesman can't sell a pipe-organ to a man who is getting ready to raise chickens or an incubator to a boy whose one hobby is collecting stamps.

But must we think of nothing but *sales*?" asks the young writer with the serious eyes. "Must we throw away all our ideals because we want to make a success of writing?"

Sometimes, doubtless, an author has had to choose between his ideals and a sale, but doesn't our study of literature show us that it is the man who has refused to throw away his ideals who has won real success, whose work has stood the test of time and shifting fashions? Then, too, the chances are that if you are a person who would suffer in discarding your ideals, and have not yet succeeded in producing a story not governed by an ideal, you couldn't please the periodicals with any ideals, no matter how hard you tried.

If you are able to write what pleases the *popular* magazines and yet have the natural talent and cultured taste necessary to satisfy the best publications you are, judging you from a business viewpoint, a fortunate person. You can work your way from the lesser to the greater magazines and publishing houses in the same way that an intelligent, ambitious boy works from a clerkship to a partnership. But if you are so constituted or so environed that you can't turn out manuscripts suited to any but the *best* readers

accept the condition cheerfully, remembering that success is no less sweet because it comes suddenly after long and patient effort instead of being won little by little with every passing day.

Whatever we do let us not make the mistake of thinking that the present-day writers who are succeeding, are succeeding because their standard is lower than ours or because they have thought only of fame or financial gain. It doesn't follow that because I don't like a book or think it harmful that it isn't likable or is pernicious. Because a man doesn't respect my ideal it doesn't follow that he hasn't any of his own.

Personally I'd rather have written one book like Mrs. Prentiss' *Stepping Heavenward* than a thousand like *The Gadfly*. I'd rather have made \$100 writing *Pam* than \$100,000 with *The Woman Thou Gavest to be with Me*. But many people consider *The Woman Thou Gavest to be with Me* a strong book and see a very good reason for the existence of *The Gadfly*, and there are some, I know, who think the *Pam* I look upon as so helpful not fit reading for their growing daughters; and one very religious woman told me she didn't care for *Stepping Heavenward* because no real husband, if a Christian, would be as thoughtless as Mrs. Prentiss' doctor. She was a married woman too!

You may have to wait a bit longer because you think more about ideals than you do about checks, but I don't believe success is denied us because we have chosen "the better part." It's

usually quite possible for a writer to be true to his principles and say what he has to say and yet be a good enough business man to put his thoughts into a form acceptable to the reading public. Mrs. Prentiss made her book on the Christian life exceedingly interesting and *Pam* managed not only to preach a sermon but to please the folks who enjoy a peep into Bohemia; and the publishers of both books had no reason to complain of the sales.

I don't believe any of us will fail because what we offer is too good.

I once sat at a counter next to a handsome, stately colored woman who was looking at *lingerie* dresses. The saleswoman held up a number for her inspection and then said hesitatingly, "We have some better ones."

"Show them to me!" commanded the colored woman, pushing aside the pile before her. "The best's none too good for me!"

Don't hesitate to give your best when you are building your article or story or poem. Only in this way can you hope to increase your powers. And, whatever the writers may think about it, the editor believes that *the best's none too good for him*.

CHAPTER SIX

The Great Art of Story Writing: Construction

"Mama, tell me a story!" begs the small boy, tired with too much play. And his big sister saunters over to the mother's chair to listen.

"Antonio, tell us a story!" commands the Captain on that famous "cold, cold night." And all the camp gathers about Antonio.

"Tell us the old, old story
Of Jesus and His love"

sings the religious poet who wants to appeal to men and women as well as growing boys and girls and very little children.

We are not very long too young and rarely grow too old to like to hear a story. It is no wonder, then, that there is a very wide market for stories and that the young writer, eager for checks and fame, should be deeply concerned with the question of how to write stories that will please the reader and satisfy the editor. As the rules underlying the making of a short story (that is, a story adapted to publication in a single issue) are essentially those which should be followed in the chapter in a long story, a study of the short story will well repay any author desirous of producing fiction.

The specific field of the story is to interest. It may give artistic pleasure; it may instruct or convict or convert; it may stimulate the reader to

fresh endeavor or draw him to a higher mental or spiritual plane; but all this is aside from its main office. Poetry for the artistic man, sermons for the lazy or discouraged man, articles and essays for the man who needs instruction; but for the man who wants to be interested, stories.

The office of the story is to interest. Because it can interest it has been used with marvellous effect to instruct and convict and uplift. But before you seek to instruct or convict or uplift your reader you should make sure that you can interest him; you can't instruct or convince a man who won't listen to you.

The short story should catch the interest in the very beginning and should hold it firmly until the last word has been said. Now just here comes in some of that fundamental matter I have been talking about: In order to catch and hold the interest your short story must be constructed according to certain rules.

A short story, say those who are considered authorities on the technique of story writing, should have a definite introduction, a definite body and a definite climax, and these parts should be so nicely balanced that no one seems too heavy or too light for the others. In following these simple rules let us continually use our God-given common sense, without which, as I shall continue to assert, we cannot hope to succeed in the business of writing.

If my story naturally opens with a hero in the middle of a vigorous fist fight I need not make the man put on his coat and brush his hair

in order that I may introduce him to the reader in correct form. Will the fight introduce him, show what has given him the right to play the part of hero and why there is to be a story at all? If so, no matter how abrupt my beginning may be I have an introduction and all the introduction that is needed, even though it may be difficult to tell where my introduction ends and my body begins. The office of the introduction is simply to catch the interest and hold it until the body can be introduced.

A short story should have an introduction. Little Ann, writing her first story, has never read this rule but she feels that an introduction is a necessity. And she is in the habit of giving attention to details. She therefore begins her narrative with a careful description of the place where her scene is laid, of her characters and of the events which have influenced their lives up to the time her story begins. All this takes words and before there is any action at all, any real story, little Ann has written three thousand words or so of clear and perfectly correct English. Now, either she must extend her story into a narrative too long for a single chapter or she must crowd her action into too small a space. With all her sense of order Ann has neglected to keep her proportions correct. As I said, she has not read the rules and she has not realized that her introduction must not be out of proportion to the body of her story.

"What I want is to produce a good yarn!" interrupts an impatient author. "I don't care

whether it's correctly proportioned or not. I don't give a hang for the artistic stunt!"

"A good yarn!" That's what little Ann wanted to produce, though she would have said "an interesting story." A good general result, that's what all the writers are striving for and the editors demanding. But you can't produce a good result without consciously or unconsciously following good rules. And a very good rule is that your introduction must not over-balance your body and climax. It seems rather a pity that Ann's story will never be published just because the editor was not lured through her 3,000 words of introduction to discover her very good body and climax beyond.

Is your introduction so long that the reader may lose interest before he reaches the real beginning of your story? Is it so abrupt, so hasty that the action confuses the reader, who is utterly unprepared for it and wholly unacquainted with the persons who take part in it? If you must answer "Yes," you have a poor introduction, no matter how carefully and cleverly written it may be.

The introduction may be long or short but it must accomplish its office of catching the interest and holding it until the body is reached. The introduction is important in that it prepares the mind for the story proper. If when it is ended the reader understands the situation and is eager to go on into the body of the narrative it has done its work well; whether it is made up of action, conversation, description or discussion of character makes no difference, providing it leaves no

confusion in the reader's mind and makes him eager to forge on into the body of the tale.

The body, of course, is the main part of the story. Its office, beside maintaining the interest created by the introduction and steadily increasing it, is to bring about the climax. It should be made up of action with just enough conversation and explanation and description and discussion of thought to make the action clear, the characters real and interesting and the general effect smooth and pleasing.

A writer recently wrote me, begging to be informed if by action the editors meant elopements, automobile accidents and the like. He knew they did not. He was merely a little out of temper because an editor had told him that his stories lacked action.

Action, to the editor, means forward movement on the part of the plot. A man may move forward by running as fast as his legs will carry him, or he may propel himself in a wheel chair, or he may ride an old-fashioned high-seated bicycle, or he may sit quietly in the coach of a railway train and be carried on and on. It is by no means necessary that he steal a high-power, this year's automobile or soar aloft in a Zeppelin in order to move forward. But he can't move forward on a bicycle that has lost its wheels or in a coach that is not attached to an engine or by calmly looking out of his bed-room window and inspecting the landscape. The body must contain action, in other words; not necessarily

exciting or unusual incident, but progress toward a definite end.

Again it is merely a question of interest. The normal mind demands exercise. No matter how beautiful or novel the furnishings of a drawing-room may be, no matter how lovely or wonderful the scene upon which it looks, the healthy occupant soon tires of it. A perfectly normal man would rather be out on a slippery pavement, battling with snow and wind and being jostled by the passers-by, than sitting luxuriously inside, where *nothing happens*. So the active-minded reader soon tires of narrative, however well done, which does not mean constant forward movement toward a definite end.

For action you may have an escaped convict scaling a convent wall and later causing himself to be carried into the outer world again in a dead sister's coffin and lowered into a grave; or you may have the maneuvers of a little girl who is sent on errands to a certain house and who is afraid of the dog that lives there. The question is merely whether you can interest the reader in what befalls the convict or the little girl. The action in the short story must differ from that in the chapter only in that it must be able to work up to a culmination of interest which is virtually final; in the chapter story the action reaches a resting-place at the end of the chapter; in the short story the action stops for good.

After the body comes the climax, the point toward which the narrative has been moving from the very first. The climax is the part of

the story which satisfies the reader's curiosity, puts his fears at rest or kills his hopes. In the case of the young man with the ready fists the climax comes, not when he wins or loses the fist fight, but when he wins or loses in that greater struggle of which the fight is merely an incident. In the story of the little girl who is afraid of the dog, the climax comes when the child discovers that the dog has no desire to hurt her after all.

In the chapter from *Les Miserables* the climax comes when Jean Valjean hears dirt falling upon his coffin and believes that he is being buried alive. "There are some things stronger than the strongest man," says Victor Hugo, "and Jean Valjean fainted." This is a very excellent ending for a chapter but it would not do for a short story; the reader must know what happens after the man faints, whether or not he was buried alive. If there is only one climax this one must settle the main question which has been exciting the reader's mind.

Some years ago I read an early story of Mark Twain's in which a young woman poses as a man and is raised to a high position in some imaginary court. She falls in love and is eager to take her own place as a woman and be loved as one. But there is a law which makes it death for a woman to have been in the position the heroine has held so bravely. To declare herself a woman the heroine must die. To retain her pose as a man she must forego the joys of love and marriage. What shall she do? Mark

Twain solves the problem by remarking that it "looked easy" but he finds it isn't and bows himself off the stage. The serious writer cannot bow himself off the stage when the climax is expected. Without the climax the introduction and body must fall flat.

The ideal climax is unexpected and yet logical and convincing when it comes. If your reader says, when he has finished your story, "Well, I never expected it to turn out like that, but I see now that the action was tending toward such an ending all the time," you have done well. A surprise and yet logical ending, that is the climax to achieve.

Browning speaks of old age as "the last of life, for which the first was made." The climax is the last of the story, for which the introduction and body were made. If the ending is weak or trite or unconvincing the introduction and body must fail. Be sure, then, that you have a climax, a definite and worthy end to attain, before you begin your story. If you begin without any definite end in view you will be pretty sure to attain nothing, no matter how skillful with words and sentences and characters you may be.

Let me repeat what I have already said: Arrange your material, not in the hope of pleasing the editor by conforming to a set of arbitrary rules, but so that your narrative will catch the interest quickly, hold it firmly and leave the reader definitely amused or startled or impressed. Just interesting your reader and giving him an

added sensation of horror or amusement or pure pleasure, that is all you have to do.

The editor does not care anything about construction as construction. He wants manuscripts that will hold his readers' interest. If you can break the rules of construction and still produce a story that will hold the attention from the first sentence to the last you need not fear that your irregularities will cause you a rejection. But remember before you decide to ignore the rules that the best material may be spoiled in the use. If your good idea doesn't work up into a story that catches the interest easily, holds it steadily and gives the reader a very definite sensation of some kind as it concludes there is very probably something wrong with your construction.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Great Art of Story Writing: Style

THERE are certain principles underlying the construction of a sentence and a paragraph just as there are underlying the construction of a story or article or poem, a subway or a skyscraper. Again, you must either consciously or unconsciously respect the underlying principles if your sentence or paragraph is to accomplish its purpose.

If your meaning is always understood, if you find that you always lay the emphasis where it belongs, if your writing is pleasing, incisive or forceful just as you wish it to be, then you need not worry about the principles of style, even if you do not understand them. If you are obscure when you had hoped to enlighten, ineffective when you had sought to impress what seemed to you some valuable truth, tiresome when you had intended to be interesting, look up the principles of style and study them until you have a working knowledge of them. There are a number of good essays, explaining these principles, but none, I think, more easy to follow, more usable than Spencer's *Essay on Style*.

We must be understood; we must not over-tax our reader's mind or his patience; we must not seem to suggest that which is aside from or inimical to our purpose or to emphasize that which is unimportant or fail to bring into prominence

that with which we wish to impress our reader. If we study the principles of style we shall find that they are laid down to help us achieve what our good common sense tells us we must achieve or fail in our larger purposes. Only by respecting the principles of style can we hope to produce a good result, sentences and paragraphs that blend together into a clear and beautiful piece of writing, able to accomplish the very end for which it was created.

Our knowledge of the principles of style is to aid and not to handicap us in our struggle for success. And right here the conscientious young writer avoids one error only to fall into another. He is so anxious to be correct, elegant, impressive, that his style is correct, elegant, impressive and his story produces no effect whatever. His style as style is above reproach but his story is a failure. But let not this discourage the conscientious writer. The dress-maker must first learn to turn out gowns that are absolutely according to her patterns before she can produce those that have a grace and charm all their own and that adapt themselves perfectly to the figures that wear them. Paderewski doubtless learned to play perfectly even scales before he discovered how to produce runs which seem like a tiny breeze that quickens and deepens into a rushing wind. We shall hardly acquire a perfectly satisfactory style for story-writing without some practice and a few mistakes.

What is perfection of style in story-writing? I think I may confidently reply: Style which is

so perfectly adapted to the subject matter—whether conversation, action, description or what not—that the reader is absolutely unconscious of it.

If you are looking through a window at an interesting scene all that you ask of the glass is that it be invisible, that it does not intrude itself upon your eyes or your thoughts in any way. If you have a seat at the theatre you are not concerned that the woman in front of you has beautiful hair or a majestic figure or an attractive hat. All you ask of her is that she eliminate herself and her head-gear so that she will not come between you and the stage. If you have climbed a hill to see a much-praised view all you ask of the air is that it be invisible so that you may enjoy to the full that which you have come to see. So the perfect story style is that which is perfectly transparent, which allows the action, the conversation, whatever makes up the story, to stand out, clear and distinct. The perfect story style, in other words, effaces itself that the story may never for an instant be over-shadowed or obscured.

Booker Washington's "Up from Slavery" is an excellent example of the truth I have just been inculcating. Those who know the colored race know that the colored man delights in long words, rolling syllables, high-sounding sentences. Just as his forbears would don any ornament given them and wear it proudly, no matter what the occasion, so the average colored man seizes upon a word that catches his attention and uses

it, no matter how. To me there is therefore something very touching as well as worthy of admiration in Booker Washington's clear and simple style. He had a story to tell, and no desire to shine before his ignorant brethren or to prove to the world how well educated he was could tempt him to confuse or over-shadow his message. I venture to say that the learned professor of any subject would not find "Up from Slavery" peurile, and yet any intelligent boy or girl of ten could read it with ease and pleasure. The style is transparent, allowing the reader to see all that the author wished him to see.

If you have a pathetic story to tell, tell it. Don't try to be pathetic. The story will make its own appeal if you will only let it. If you are watching a grey-haired mother bid farewell to her immigrant son as he boards the ship which is to carry him away from her, perhaps forever, you don't need anyone to explain to you how sad such partings are. The mother's bowed grey head, her tears, her inarticulate murmurings of grief and love will move you far more than all the eloquent reflections a bystander could possibly make.

If you have a humorous story to tell, tell it. Don't annoy the reader by pointing out how funny it is or by trying to be humorous yourself. If the story is amusing he'll see that it is without your help. Let him enjoy the fun in peace.

If you have a story of sentiment, adventure, business, whatever you have, tell it. Don't talk about your material or your characters. Bear in

mind that the perfect style is that which perfectly reveals the story it tells. The minute your style gets in your story's way it is not good style, no matter how correct it may be.

"He that loseth his life shall find it," said Christ to the Jews who were piously expecting an opportunity to aggrandize themselves. In the literary world as well as in the spiritual it is true that the man who is willing to lose his life finds it. When Lincoln gave himself for an alien race he was not expecting to become the nation's most revered hero. And when he wrote a letter to the mother who had lost three sons in her country's service the last thought in his mind, I am sure, was that his letter would ever be quoted as an example of perfect style.

In Barrie's "Sentimental Tommy" you may recall the old woman who each year hired the dominie to write her a letter to her daughter in Ireland. Each year the message she gave the dominie to expand into a letter for her was the same: "Dear Kaytherine, if you dinna send ten shillings immediately, your puir auld mother will have neither house nor hame. I'm crying to you for't, Kaytherine; hearken and you'll hear my cry across the cauldriif sea."

The school-master employed all his skill to play upon the girl's sympathy and affection and each year his letter elicited a present of five shillings. But when, one year, Tommy asked to write the letter, behold the girl sent the whole ten shillings! Why? Because Tommy, instead of

trying to be more eloquent than the dominie, had used nothing but the mother's own words:

"Dear Kaytherine, if you dinna send me ten shillings immediately, your puir auld mother will have neither house nor hame. I'm crying to you for't, Kaytherine; hearken and you'll hear my cry across the cauldrieff sea."

Tommy loved to write. To draw upon his imagination and his vocabulary was the breath of life to him, but he was too good an artist in his own light.

Ah, how many a good story is spoiled in the telling, either because the writer is too ignorant or too careless to follow the simple rules of style or because he cannot resist the temptation to show how well he can write!

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Great Art of Story Writing: Adaptation of Style to Material

JUST a few years ago I read a serial for a minister who wanted to enter the profession of authorship. He thought he had written a story, but his action was frankly borrowed from the Bible, his characters were mere mouth-pieces for the expression of religious truths, and he had made no attempt to disguise the fact that his object was the spiritual uplift of his readers. He had failed to respect the rule that a story's office is to interest, and his story, though carefully written and showing that the author was to be trusted as a religious guide, was a failure.

I wrote the minister that he must not try to write a story and at the same time preach a sermon, unless the action of the story could preach the sermon without his help. I think I pointed out to him as I have to other new writers the wonderful power in St. Paul's, "This one thing I do."

The minister replied that he had written his serial for a succession of Sunday night services and had then conceived the idea of selling it as a story. He said he realized the force of my arguments and he would hereafter not attempt to turn a sermon into a story. Today this man is selling to the "big" magazines. He writes stories

and he writes articles and he sells both. If he writes a story his style is the story writer's style, swift, vivid, direct. If he writes an article he is concerned with the truths he wishes to enforce: he is persuasive, earnest, sometimes compelling and always convincing. I've never heard him preach a sermon but I'd like to. I understand that he holds a high place in his denomination. Respecting the truth that a story's office is to interest and the rule that the author's style must always adapt itself to his subject matter has not made him fail as a clergyman and a reformer.

Another clergyman, who is very much in earnest and who would gladly work hours on an address if by so doing he could help any member of his flock or any department of his church, once addressed his Sunday School in my hearing. The lesson was about St. John and alluded to the Island of Patmos. The pastor began his talk by remarking that Patmos was "one of the ethnological islands of the Egean Sea." Well, I'd been brought up on the Bible and I'd heard innumerable sermons and I'd been to college, and I'll confess I didn't know what the minister was trying to tell us. I think I'm pretty safe in asserting that the bright boys of sixteen or seventeen whom he was so desirous of uplifting didn't. If you are writing for children use words a child can understand. You can't hold any reader if he doesn't understand you. Adapt your material to your audience and your style to your material.

I had the honor of having Tahan (as a white man, Joseph K. Griffis), the Indian lecturer and

writer, ask me to give him an opinion on his first printed story. It began:

"The trees had leafed sixteen times since Tsilta first opened her eyes in her father's tepee. Her full rounded form was that of a young antelope that dances in the sunshine when the grass is green and tender. . . . Red Scar was gaunt, wrinkled and ugly and had two wives."

You will not wonder that after pointing out a few minor irregularities I added: "But only a person who was looking for flaws could find any fault in your style. It is well adapted—perhaps I might better say, perfectly adapted—to the subject matter. Your figures are well chosen and in every case appealing."

Tahan replied that I was not severe enough and ended his letter, "With good heart-thoughts, Chief Tahan."

Before my criticism of the short story had caught up with him as he moved from place to place on his lecture circuit Tahan had sold his first book. He has unusual material, it is true, but I fancy that the charm of his Indian imagery, so perfectly adapted to this material, has a very great deal to do with his immediate success in the profession of authorship. Suppose he'd begun his story,

"Tsilta was sixteen years of age."
And what if he'd signed his letter, "Yours sincerely, Joseph K. Griffis"!

My style in my story, then, must be adapted (1) to story writing, (2) to the reader's tastes and intelligence, (3) to my story material.

(Some years ago I ran across a young girl whose companionship was eagerly sought, no matter in what environment she happened to be. A little later I spent a summer traveling about with her and then I discovered her secret. We stayed at a farm-house, and she helped the farmer's wife sort peaches, talked fertilizers with the farmer and eagerly discussed agricultural schools with the farmer's son. Then we went to a hotel, where among other guests were a college athlete, an Episcopalian clergyman and his wife, a little girl of ten and an old lady who was rarely able to go out. In the same day my companion played "jacks" with the little girl, went swimming with the student, discussed theology and how to interest young boys in church work with the minister, took a hand at whist to help the minister's wife make up a game and held worsted for the old lady. And each one of the five found her delightful. Now if my girl had expected the big student to play "jacks," or had insisted that the little girl spend her time crocheting or had tried to talk theology with the minister's wife or make the minister play whist or had suggested that the old lady go out in the hot sun to watch her swim, she would not have won such golden opinions. If she had giggled at the minister and the old lady, looked shocked when the minister's wife proposed whist, and assumed a dignified, elderly manner while pretending to swim and play "jacks" she would very probably not have been sought as a companion a second time.) By

adapting herself to the person she was with and the matter in hand she was herself interesting.

If you are flippant when you should be grave, stiff when you should be easy and graceful, slangy when your subject matter demands pure English or if you never give a thought to the reader for whom your story is intended, you will spoil your material, no matter how carefully you have chosen it or how correct your construction may be.

CHAPTER NINE

The Great Art of Story Writing: The Element of Suspense—Viewpoint

WHEN we were children we had an aunt who used to tell us delightfully terrible stories. She told them so well that I—the smallest of the group—could rarely be induced to remain a quiet listener until the crisis was passed. "Did he die, Aunt Ruth?" I would burst out. "Did he die?" just as the others were most eager for her to go on. And I would insist with loud wails and many tears that I at once be told the worst or the best.

The other children insisted on not knowing whether the hero lived or died until the proper time and nightly threatened me with ejection and exclusion from further story-tellings if I wouldn't "keep still." They did not know anything about construction or climax but they did know that if they learned too soon how the story came out their pleasure was spoiled. It was this very element of suspense which my small mind was unable to bear that made the joy of the story-telling for them.

The great art of story-telling lies in the skillful handling of the element of suspense. If there is no suspense or if it is relieved too soon the story cannot hold the interest, and, as we have agreed, the peculiar office of the story is to interest.

I was reading Trollope's "Barchester Towers" the other day and finding myself a little bored when I came upon this: "But let the gentle reader be under no apprehension whatever. It is not destined that Eleanor shall marry either Mr. Slope or Bertie Stanhope." Trollope, having relieved the reader's mind about Eleanor's marriage proceeds to explain his feeling regarding the element of suspense in story writing. He says he believes in perfect confidence between the author and the reader and he condemns the insincerity of the art which spends itself in creating fears only to destroy them. And then he adds the following, which, I think, proves Trollope wrong and the accepted authorities on story-writing right:

"When we have once learned what was the picture before which was hung Mrs. Ratcliffe's solemn curtain we feel no further interest about either the frame or the veil.

"And then how grievous a thing it is to have the pleasure of your novel destroyed by the ill-considered triumph of a previous reader!

"'Oh, you needn't be alarmed for Augusta; of course she accepts Gustavus in the end!'

"'How very ill-natured you are, Susan!' says Kittie, with tears in her eyes. 'I don't care a bit about it now!'

Let the writer who insists upon anticipating his climax, who believes, like Trollope, that it is wise to take the reader into his confidence, read this same "Barchester Towers" and then read a novel by some author who believes in suspense, for example, Charles Reade. Such a reading may perhaps disclose why Trollope is found today

only in the public libraries and on the shelves of the litterateur while Reade is still read as eagerly as when he first wrote his "Never to Late to Mend" and "The Cloister and the Hearth."

How can I maintain the suspense and still be sincere, not permit my reader to understand whither events are moving and yet not wilfully deceive him? By using the same point of view all the way through your short story or, in the novel, your chapter.

What is meant by viewpoint in story writing? I think I should hardly be exaggerating if I said that I have been asked this question a thousand times: What is meant by viewpoint?

Your point of view is merely the point or the place from which you view an object or a landscape or a constantly changing scene. A farmer stands in his barn-door and looks straight ahead of him. From his point of view he can see the chickens in the chicken-yard, the barn-yard with its group of cows, the farm-house and his wife moving about before the kitchen windows, but he cannot see himself as he stands in the open barn-door or the building which forms his background. His wife, from her point of view, can see the chickens and the cows and her husband and the barn, but she cannot see herself or the farm-house. The two are not very far apart but the point of view of the one is quite distinct from that of the other.

Change from the physical to the mental point of view and you will know what the editors and

critics mean by viewpoint in the story: To the farmer the house seems comfortable, cheery, a place of refuge to which he may go after his hard day's work. He thinks of his wife as a happy woman. He guesses that she is grateful she has not been obliged to go out into the cold spring air and the heavy spring mud. He says to himself that Mary must be glad to be away from her old noisy, inconvenient home and mistress of his up-to-date, well-equipped house. He imagines her rapid movements mean that she is hurrying with the last of her tasks so she may be free to make him comfortable as soon as he comes in and then have supper; she'll be anxious to know how he made out with his first plowing of the year.

To the wife the barn looks aggressively big and modern. She wonders how much money her husband spent upon his new silo at the left of it and whether he really needed the extension he has had built at the right side. She wants a trip to the city or to town or the dear old farmhouse or anywhere away from this dreary place where she has spent such a lonely winter. She wants to talk about the little village church, the neighbors, the new fashions, her old home, a thousand things that are quite outside the farm life and its humdrum interests. The husband and wife are living in very close relation and they have the same environment yet their mental or spiritual points of view are quite different.

Suppose I want to tell a story about this man

and wife, my object being to show how the happiness of the young couple was put on a firmer basis, the wife learning to appreciate the husband's industry and ambition as well as his love and care for her, the husband coming to realize that the wife has desires and needs beyond those of her healthy young body. If I am to produce this result and yet surprise the reader when I have accomplished my task I must not reveal the thoughts of both of my characters except as their words and actions may reveal them. I cannot let the reader see into the mind of each and yet surprise him when one or the other reveals a state of mind which is necessary to the other's well-being or happiness. Only by using the viewpoint of but one of my characters can I sustain the suspense, which, we have seen, is the great factor in holding interest.

Whose point of view shall I choose? Obviously the one which will permit of the greater suspense and the more complete surprise. If a misunderstanding arises between the husband and wife and the husband soon discovers that the wife's irritability and unreasonableness are merely tired nerves and he forms a plan to give her the rest and change she needs; and if to the wife the misunderstanding looms large and immovable, I shall choose the wife's point of view rather than the husband's. The greater suspense and hence the greater surprise and relief must be the wife's, and therefore I must choose the wife's point of view if I am to give the reader

as much as possible of suspense and relief and surprise.

In stories of sentiment, of "heart interest," the viewpoint of some character is for obvious reasons wise. In a story of adventure, where there is no effort to stir the passions or affections of the reader, the general point of view may be used; that is, the story may be told as it occurs without allowing the reader to see into the mind of any one of the characters except in a general way. But the element of suspense must never for a moment be sacrificed. If you have two opposing parties you must give the action as only one party acts it or sees it occur. If you change from party to party you will destroy or weaken the suspense and so destroy or weaken the interest.

I once heard a clergyman urge his congregation to look at a certain truth "from a real point of view." All points of view are real, the clergyman's no more so than that of hearers who did not agree with him. What we see from our point of view may not be real but our viewpoint is real enough. Think of your character's viewpoint as real. Don't let your child character see what your admired pastor or college professor or great-aunt would see in a situation. Don't let your street urchin think thoughts that require a knowledge of mechanics or psychology or hygienics. Don't have your woman of the world as guileless as your carefully reared and tenderly protected seventeen-year-old sister.

In story-writing the clergyman's appeal would

have had some meaning. Let the reader see the scene and the action from a real point of view. Be sincere, in other words, in the handling of your viewpoint. Know the character whose viewpoint you use and then give the story as he lives it, true to the mind and heart and training you have given him, no matter where, such fidelity may lead you.

Whose mind do I want the reader to assume as he follows the action of my story? That of the chief actor, that of the person the chief actor wishes to defeat or to win to his way of thinking, that of a bystander who has nothing personal at stake but who is keenly interested in what is going on and the final issue? Whose mind do I want the reader to assume: That of a normal, reasonable man, with correct judgment and a healthy conscience? Of a criminal whose soul is warped by sin and fierce brooding over real or fancied wrongs? Of an egotist who can't see anyone's rights or happiness or suffering but his own? Of a little child whose "bad" and "good" are so closely allied that they seem only different phases of a healthy development? Of a madman? Whatever viewpoint I choose I must never for a moment forget it or deliberately cast it aside or confuse it with my own.

Margaret Deland has a character who, when another person's faults are discussed, is pretty sure to say: "I can see his side of it," or "her side of it," as the case may be. Showing John's side of it is what we mean by using John's point of view. Make the reader see John's side of it

and he'll want what John wants. If you can make him want what John wants he won't lay your story down until he has found out whether John obtains his desire or not. In order to hold the interest, then, all I have to do is to make the reader see the opening situation as it looks to John, plan with John, hope with John, suffer with John and be *in suspense* with John until the very end of the story. Showing John's side of it, how things looked to John, that is all there is to telling a story from John's viewpoint.

Viewpoint is an important factor in story-telling. Unless you have a natural appreciation of how to keep the reader's sympathies alive and warm and how to maintain suspense you cannot afford to close your ears to what the authorities say about viewpoint. There is nothing which will more quickly destroy the value of your plot idea or the charm of your style than carelessness or insincerity in the matter of viewpoint.

CHAPTER TEN

The Great Art of Story Writing: Characterization

THERE is a very readable story about a gingerbread boy who having been baked came to life, ran away from the woman who had made him and proceeded to have many exciting adventures. If your readers are very young and not very exacting in their demand for adventure you may succeed in holding the interest and still have only a gingerbread hero. And, if your adventure is sufficient novel and exciting, you may have adult readers and hold their interest and still have found nothing more lifelike out of which to make your hero than good hard white dough. But you can't interest the intelligent mature reader in the hopes of a dough man or in his tears or his love-making. In your story of sentiment your characters must be human, alive, real.

When I was a young girl I used to see a great deal of a man and wife of very different temperaments, both of whom had the story-telling habit. The man lived on a very lofty plane, far up above ordinary persons like I was, and he was utterly incapable of seeing the little details that play so large a part in most lives. His stories always had a point, but they never thrilled or moved me, and after I had heard them once I had no desire to

hear them again. His wife, on the other hand, missed nothing that was human. If she told a story about an old lady the old lady instantly became alive. She showed me the small brown house where the old lady lived, the green box hedge above which her white head appeared now and then to the passers-by as she moved about in her old-fashioned garden. She had remembered the woman's odd little accent and her frequent gestures and she reproduced them. And so the old lady in the brown house with the old-fashioned garden shut in by a green hedge became real to me, and I could sigh for her and laugh over her and be tranquilly happy with her as my friend depicted her. Whether the character was an old lady or an over-grown boy or a frail baby-girl or a practical, middle-aged man made no difference. He or she was always interesting because each was revealed by the aid of small details that made each quicken into life. The mannerisms, individual expressions, habits of thought and speech revealed the inner life of the characters. And I used to beg for what the wife called her "foolish little stories" and ask her to tell them to my friends, and I could have heard them a hundred times with keen enjoyment.

I have thought a great deal about this matter of characterization and I have come to the conclusion that it's largely knowing what details to use that makes the difference between characters that are real and vivid and those that are just brown or white dough.

Do you know a picture of a little boy with a hollow in the back of his neck, kneeling and saying his prayers? If you do and you've ever loved a little boy and you are a woman you've wanted to kiss that hollow. It took an artist to notice that when a little boy stoops his head he makes a hollow in the back of his neck and that women have loved that hollow since women and children were.

Take one of Margaret Deland's sketches of Dr. Lavendar: Dr. Lavendar is old and he sleeps little. He does not want to annoy his housekeeper by rising before it is light so he lies awake, in the early dawn, watching the familiar objects in his room become visible one by one and planning for the good of his people. You know that old persons are wakeful early in the morning and that a tired housekeeper doesn't like to rise long before it's necessary and that most women hate to have a man knocking about a house before they're up and that the objects in a room become visible one by one as dawn approaches. But did you ever think of making an old man and his housekeeper and their home real and vivid by using this knowledge?

Take another of Margaret Deland's characters, Dr. King: You were brought up in the country or you've been there often on your summer vacations; but would you have thought to have had all the doctor's old patients address him as "Willy King" and would you have had the doctor as he rode along an unfrequented country road dangle his foot comfortably over the side of his

buggy? How real these little familiar touches make Margaret Deland's character!

Study Lucy in "Love Me Little, Love Me Long." Can't you see her? She is so dainty, so utterly clean and fresh and sweet physically and spiritually, so incapable of being anything but a lady even when she tries! Lucy is fine and delicate, in her sense of humor, in her perception of shams, in her high-bred snubs, in her loving. Reade knew "a perfect lady" and a womanly woman when he saw them, and he combined the two in Lucy Fountain. No matter what she is doing, no matter whom she is talking to, no matter what her environment, Lucy is always herself, always womanly, always dainty and sweet, always a lady. Only by careful attention to details could Reade have created so charming and convincing a character as Lucy Fountain.

Take a scene from "Pam". Pam is an odd girl and she has an odd companion, a monkey, which she has loved and lived with since she was a small child and whose mournful eyes sometimes suggest her own. Lonely little Pam finds great comfort in her monkey.

Pam's mother is not married, and since Pam's father is devoted to her mother and the mother is ideally happy, and since Pam knows a great many married couples who are neither happy nor devoted, the girl decides that she will not marry. She makes it a principle not to marry.

When Pam is still very young she falls in love. She is loved in return but her lover is already engaged to a woman who can aid him greatly in

a worldly way and poor little Pam is not at all a good match.

The lover decides to give up the other woman and marry Pam; but Pam refuses to be married. She admits her love but explains that she does not believe in marriage. Of course the selfish lover sees his chance to help himself politically and socially and still have the girl of his heart: He proposes to marry his duchess' daughter—and make Pam his mistress.

Now Pam had meant merely to omit the marriage ceremony. She had intended to be absolutely true to her lover and that he should be absolutely true to her. The relation was to be as pure and as final and as open as though sanctified by the marriage vow.

The girl declines the man's second offer. But she cannot help loving him and she goes to the station to see him off as he takes the train back to his *fiancée*.

The story ends with little Pam, the train having pulled out, standing desolate upon the platform, *with her monkey in her arms!*

Could any other ending have been as pathetic and convincing and withal as impressive in its teaching as this picture of Pam with only a monkey to comfort her?

Let no writer think that character drawing is mere careful attention to details. The details are important only as they suggest that which is important, namely, the inner life of the character, and as they help to make up a perfect and con-

vincing whole. If there were nothing to Lucy but her daintiness and good manners and nothing to Pam but her mournful eyes and her monkey we should not care very much about either.

In "The Awakening of Helena Richie" Mrs. King asks her husband to bring her some sachet powder from the city and he forgets it. How can such a small incident reveal a character's inner life? Dr. King greatly admires Mrs. Richie, who among other charms, as Mrs. King has noted, has "a sort of fragrance about her" Mrs. King, practical, inclined to scold, not very attractive in person or manner, envies Mrs. Richie her charm and is vaguely unhappy in noting its effect upon the doctor. Isn't her asking her husband to bring her sachet powder that she too may emanate "a kind of fragrance" enlightening? And doesn't it some way soften our hearts towards Mrs. King? And when the husband, who had intended to take dinner with Mrs. Richie's "brother" and bring her news of him, is almost elbowed out of Lloyd's house and comes home without the powder, is not that not only convincing but very significant? A man's mind can't be filled with one woman and he remember the little wants of another. Mrs. Deland does not tell us that Dr. King is in love with Mrs. Richie and that Martha is becoming jealous. She does not have to tell us. We see the situation by means of a hundred little details.

Sometimes a writer fails in characterization—and in keeping alive the "story interest" too—because he is too lazy or too careless to give the

hard work necessary to bring these small but significant details out. Sometimes he fails because he has not the power to see the details. In order to depict one must see, either with the eye or the mind. You can't get out of your brain what is not there. The most active imagination, say the psychologists, cannot originate an idea. It can combine old ideas into a new one. It can develop an old idea into a seeming new one. But it cannot make something out of nothing. If you go through life with your spiritual eyes shut you cannot hope to find plenty of good material in your mind when you wish to depict character.

If you have never seen people as they are beneath the surface, have never entered into their hopes and fears and experienced with them their triumphs and defeats, never been able to break away from the boundaries of your own heart and mind and soul, you can hardly depict character well. You can perhaps write excellent fiction, adventure, business, detective, mystery, but you cannot depict character and you cannot write stories of sentiment.

Characterization is important, not only in holding the interest, but because it is through our characters that we make our highest appeal and our most lasting impressions. If you want to produce stories that go to the heart of your reader, that make him laugh and weep and cry out that he will be a better man, stories that can stir a hardened woman so that she will start out to find the child she has deserted or that will send a thoughtless boy or girl "back home," you

must have vivid, convincing characterization. You must have, not statues or carefully painted pictures or pieces of dough fashioned to simulate human creatures, but real people ; you must have breathing, suffering, sinning, loving, living personalities.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Great Art of Story Writing: Plots

NO matter how interesting and novel your characters, no matter how beautiful and unique your setting, no matter even how much fresh and pleasing action you may have gathered together, you have not the material for any kind of a story unless you have a plot. Yet many an enthusiastic young author sits down to write a story without being at all sure that his "idea" embodies plot material.

Plot, as has been explained a great many times, means an obstacle to be overcome or one force at war with another; it means *something definite to be accomplished*, in other words. If my "idea" does not furnish me with this something it is not a plot idea or at least it is not a fully developed plot idea.

I think one cause for the young writer's mistakes in choosing his material is that, having been told to go to life for it, he expects to find plot ideas, ready to use, awaiting his keen eye. Now plots are a good deal like gold nuggets. They are plentiful enough, if one knows where to look for them, but they cannot be picked up by the basketful, ready to sell. The man who wants to get gold out of a mine must know, not only where there is a mine but also how to get hold of the gold and how to put it into shape to carry away.

If my raw material does not give me *something definite to be accomplished*, either an obstacle to be overcome or two forces at war for a definite prize, then, however fresh and genuine it may be, it is not yet ready to use in a story; it is not yet plot. If I am sure of its value my first task must be to break part of it away, to add to it, to remold it so that it is plot and ready for my story.

Let me illustrate: Oliver Wendell Holmes finds among his patients a person who has an antipathy, that is, has definite physical symptoms in the presence of a certain class of objects. This suggests a story but there is no plot in the discovery. Holmes' mind plays about the situation and he finally hits upon the question: What would happen if a man had an antipathy, not to pigs or the fragrance of violets or the sound of a violin, but to women? Now the author is nearer to plot but still he has *nothing definite to be accomplished*. Finally he conceives of a young man who is obliged to live as a recluse because he cannot stand the presence of a woman and because if he mingles in human society he must naturally run across women. The young man is not very happy. In order to be made happy he must be able to overcome his antipathy and have association with women as other men do. How *can this be accomplished?* Now Holmes has a plot idea. When he works out the plan of having his hero physically helpless with his house on fire and an athletic young woman carrying the shrinking man out in her strong arms and love,

aided by the nervous excitement of the moment, casting out the nervous disorder, he has plot, fully developed.

Suppose you are calling on a high-bred, conventional woman and in the midst of the conversation her seventeen-year-old daughter announces that she does not believe in marriage. There is no plot in her declaration, that is, not a complete plot idea; but there is the germ of a plot idea. The mother flushes a little and then reminds the girl that she has an engagement or asks her to perform some service which takes her from the room or turns her thoughts from the question of marriage. You know that as soon as they are alone the mother will tell the daughter that such a statement as she so boldly made is not good form, not good morals and not even safe. You are sure that the daughter will be convinced by the mother's arguments and that no evil will come of the girl's thoughtlessly conceived belief.

Let your imagination play around the girl's declaration: Suppose the mother, still young in appearance and very beautiful and "as good as gold," is not married to the girl's father. Suppose the father is an artist and careless about conventions and the mother has been brought up by a well-born but irresponsible father and the two are living together in perfect happiness and without a care for the world which condemns them. Suppose the daughter of such a father and mother declares she does not believe in marriage and her lover has just had a hard struggle with himself before he could ask her to marry him and

so put behind him the woman who can help him attain his ambitions. Ah, now we have something very definite to dread! We have two very vital forces at war. Which will win, the belief that marriage is not necessary or even right, backed up by the man's pleading and the girl's ardent love, or the girl's natural purity and rectitude which tells her that it can never be right for a man to pledge his love openly to one woman and live in secret with another? And now we have the situation in "Pam" as it is just before the story closes and surely a well-developed plot. But we've traveled a long ways from our conventional drawing-room with its careful mother and very innocent, very ignorant little daughter.

When you are told to go to life for your material don't think that all you must do is to keep your eyes open and allow your imagination to lie dormant. Your imagination is your great natural gift. Use it upon what you see. If your stories contain only plot ideas that are discovered ready to your hand, you will never be a writer of strong fiction. You will never produce very much that is either fresh or valuable.

Another mistake of the new writer is to suppose that because a real experience "seems like a story," is like a story, it will furnish him with good plot material. If you hear of an experience which strongly suggests a story you have seen in print you have a very excellent reason for not using that experience in a manuscript of your own.

I had an uncle who did not enjoy the restrictions of his father's governing and who ran away from home when he was twelve years old. After some terrible experiences he succeeded in stowing away what was left of his poor little body in the hold of a sailing-vessel. Fortunately the captain's wife happened to be accompanying her husband on his trip, and she took the waif into her cabin and also into her heart. After a while the captain, who supposed the child to be an orphan, adopted him. It was not until the boy was of age that he told the truth and was induced to go home and see his mother. Yes, and the captain left his adopted son all of his modest fortune, too! That's a thrilling adventure to hear fresh from the lips of the man who has lived it, a man you are related to and love. But I couldn't make a story out of it for the very simple reason that runaways and stowaways and well-to-do men who adopt poor boys and mothers who rejoice over long-lost sons have all appeared in fiction, not once but many, many times. My plot must be, not only real plot, fully developed, but it must be fresh or seemingly fresh. Even though my material has come to me direct from life it will not seem fresh and original if similar material has been used over and over again by other writers.

I am sure that some writer is eagerly waiting for me to come to the end of my paragraph so that he can hurl at me that old argument about there being nothing new under the sun. The man who hates or pretends to hate women is

very old in fiction; it has been used until we are all sick and tired of it. But when Holmes thought of a high-strung little child receiving a nervous shock at the hands of a woman and growing into a man who was physically unable to bear the presence of a woman he had conceived a variation of the woman hater which seems quite fresh, even today. "A Mortal Antipathy" stands out by itself, no matter how many stories you may have read about men who shunned women's society.

Take "Pam" again: What could be older than the man who is loved by two women, one wealthy, of noble family and very beautiful, the other poor, with no family pretensions, by no means able to compete with her rival in physical attractions? But when you have the poor, less striking woman not believe in marriage, and when you show us convincing reasons for her wishing not to marry, you have a fresh situation. "Pam" seems very fresh certainly as one reads it.

There is nothing very fresh in a woman's living with a man she expects to marry later and then discovering, when she wishes to marry, that the man has grown tired of her. But when Margaret Deland conceived of a sweet and womanly woman entering into 'illicit relations with a lover, because her husband had killed her child and would soon "drink himself to death" so she would be free to marry again, and this woman utterly unable to see that she has committed any sin, since she has been so sinned against; and when through the love of three others—a middle-aged, conscientious husband, a

dreamy young artist who knows nothing of life, a little boy—and the havoc she works among them this woman is brought to acknowledge her error and find her soul's peace and later her happiness, there was created a fresh situation, fresh plot material, a fresh and helpful story. "The Awakening of Helena Ritchie" will always seem individual, no matter how many stories of women who preferred love to morality you may bring around it.

If you are a real artist, if you have the power to see a little deeper into life than "the average reader" sees, you need not fear because no lurid, bizarre, or even striking plot ideas reveal themselves to your eyes. All that is required of you is that you have the power to make a definite plot seem freshly interesting as you develop it into a story. If I were a painter and had a new vision of the soul of Jeanne D'Arc I should not hesitate to put my vision on canvas because artists have been painting Jeanne D'Arc since long before I began to handle a brush. My fresh point of view would justify my painting, provided the view was valuable and the painting good. If I see a situation, however old, as no story I know reveals it, I shall not hesitate to use it in my own manuscript.

I have taken my illustrations from novels rather than from short stories because novels are more easy to locate if the student-writer wishes to refer to the story discussed as well as more likely to have been read and remembered. All that I have said applies to the short story. The office

of any story is to interest. We cannot hold the interest and work with material which is poor or tattered and torn from over-handling. Whatever we choose in the way of plot let it be worthy of the time and thought we must spend upon it before we can develop it into a readable narrative.

We poor critics and advisors to authors are often at our wits' end as to how to steer the new writer so that he may reach the desired goal. We say, "Study the rules," and the author turns out a piece of work which is mechanically perfect but which has no originality, no spontaneity, no life. We say, "Study the standard authors," and the writer proceeds laboriously to copy some author he admires. We say, "Be yourself," and the author joyously concocts something which is so unlike anything the editor ever saw before that the poor man does not know what to make of it. But this should cause us no surprise or consternation. In story-writing as in other arts the worker must struggle through mistakes and very definite obstacles in the way of personal likes and weaknesses and ideals before he can hope to approach perfection. Whether in style, characterization or plot building our hope of development lies in giving with each story our intelligent best. "My own and the best I have," should be the young writer's guiding principle as he plans and as he writes each story.

I have chosen the short story to discuss at length for several reasons beside the fact that the demand for short stories is very great and the young writer usually eager to enter this field:

The principles which underlie the short story are virtually those which govern the article and, in a very broad sense, the poem also. Every composition should be built up in such a way that it quickly catches the interest, holds it and reaches some sort of a climax. Each should be so proportioned that no part seems to over-lap or overshadow the others. Every composition should have some definite excuse for being. In each the style should be so perfectly adapted to the subject matter that the interested reader would be puzzled to determine wherein the charm of the whole lies. Moreover, the construction of a chapter in a long story is exactly the same as that of a short story except that in the chapter the climax is a resting-place rather than the end of the journey; in all but the last chapter a climax is reached only that the reader may pause for a moment and then start on with added interest toward the final goal.

If you can write short stories that are technically satisfactory you can write any prose composition you have material for. To the versatile young writer, therefore, the mastery of the short story is of vital importance. I know of no better way to develop a sense of order and harmony and an appreciation of purity and sincerity of style than by writing short stories.

Mine, then, and the best I have in each short story we produce in our business of writing.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Using Acquaintance as Material

IN Barrie's "When a Man's Single" a writer, about to be married, discovers that he is afraid to enter the unknown state. Instantly it occurs to him that his feeling would make an article and he hastily jots down, "Man afraid to be married." Then, realizing what he has done, he exclaims, "God forgive me, I'd made copy out of my mother's coffin!"

The born story writer cannot help seeing copy when it lies before him, even though it lie in the person of his nearest and dearest or the man to whom he owes the greatest respect and the truest allegiance of which his heart is capable. Let the reader who is not by nature fitted to write, who has no impulse to write, hold his hand before he begins to cast stones at the poor author, big with a new plot or character. Each walk of life has its peculiar privileges and temptations and it behooves each of us to be as generous to the other man's mistakes as we possibly can. But the writer who uses any material which comes to his hand, regardless of where he found it or how much pain its appearing in print would cause, is not only selfish to the point of cruelty but also a very foolish person. Personal material may prove a two-edged sword, dangerous to

handle as well as run against in the hand of another.

I once heard a new writer telling a young girl about a story he was planning. He had found his material in an experience of a very prominent citizen of the girl's town.

"Why, everyone here would know whom you meant!" she exclaimed.

"I suppose they would," the writer admitted, "but every one of the standard authors has used the experiences of real persons. Look at Shakespeare!"

"Well, go ahead," answered the girl, who knew her townspeople, "but when your book comes out you'll wish you were as dead as Shakespeare is!"

Count the cost before you "write up" your personal friend, or enemy, and mail your manuscript to an editor. No matter how far away the used person may be or how unlikely he is to see the periodical for which you write you can never be sure that he will not read your story or article or poem, once you drop it into the mailbox.

A rather amusing experience happened to a friend of mine, a young man who has not been writing very long but who generally sells what he writes. He had a very painful but illuminating adventure and thinking it might help some other young fellow and incidentally bring him a check he wrote it up and sent it to a magazine which not a person he knew took or, he felt pretty sure, had ever heard of. He lived in the East and the magazine was published in the far West. His

manuscript was promptly accepted. A few days after the story was published my friend happened to answer a ring at his mother's door and was eagerly greeted by a bright little boy who said he was taking subscriptions for a very excellent but not very well known magazine.

"It has good stories in it!" urged the little boy and, opening his sample copy, he disclosed to the writer's startled eyes his own story.

I had a somewhat similar experience when I first began to write. I spent a summer in a little fishing-hamlet in Canada and of course I found some material awaiting me. We were ten miles over a rough, mountainous road from the railroad and New York seemed thousands of miles away. I didn't see a single magazine all the time I was in the hamlet, except those I had brought with me or had sent to me. I sold my manuscript to the Saturday Supplement of the New York Post. No one in my little hamlet, I felt sure, read the New York Post.

Shortly after my article appeared I received a caustic, though still friendly letter from the daughter of the woman with whom I had boarded and whom I had included in my sketch. She said the hamlet was busy reading and re-reading my contribution and was greatly excited at finding itself in print. Well, I had laughed a little at some of the hamlet's peculiarities but as I had also shown warm affection and some sincere admiration for the fisherman and their wives I believe I was finally forgiven; and I'd venture back to the hamlet tomorrow if I could get to

it. But discovering that the New York papers were read in a little village in Canada where the mail came in only twice a week convinced me that print travels far and that a writer who sells his manuscript can never feel sure that it will not be read by the very person he especially desires should not see it.

The editor of a New York magazine with which I was at one time connected received a pitiful letter from a girl in the far West who told him that she liked his periodical very much indeed but begged that he would stop "scandling" her. The astonished editor went over his whole issue, recently mailed, to try and discover what the girl meant. When he could find nothing that explained the letter he answered it with a request that the girl tell him just where in his magazine she had come upon something which seemed to reflect upon her. The girl replied that all her acquaintances were laughing at her because the magazine had made fun of her and again begged the editor to leave her in peace. We finally decided that the subscriber was a little unbalanced and had imagined that some story or article or picture she had found in her copy was intended to ridicule her. But of course it is very possible that some contributor had used the poor girl and that her townspeople had at once recognized her and had not all been kind enough to refrain from amusing themselves at her expense. At any rate the incident shows that even when a person is not up to the standard mentally he may have a

heart and may suffer in seeing his weaknesses or oddities in print.

Is it right to take material from the life immediately about us? Where else should we obtain it? How can we depict that which we have never seen or have seen only dimly and from a great distance? Once more let us use our good common sense, this time our kindly common sense. If we know that our using the experience of an acquaintance would cause that acquaintance pain or expose him to disrespect or ridicule we have no right to use him, merely because we like to sell manuscripts or are in need of money. If we have a message to deliver and our acquaintance' experience helps us to deliver it I think we have a right to use it even though our acquaintance may suspect where we found our material and be annoyed or angered by our action. We have, of course, no right to use that which has been told us in confidence if our using it will make public an experience the confidant wishes kept concealed.

Again, if we use an acquaintance for the sake of making him appear ridiculous or belittling him or "paying him back" for some real or fancied injury done us we are employing our talent for a very mean purpose and deserve to have it taken from us and given to someone with a better idea of how talent should be used. If we use a character because it helps us reveal some truth which is of lasting moment to the reader, being careful not to reproduce any mental or physical peculiarity which will be at once recog-

nized in the community where it exists, we are quite within our rights and no fair-minded person will condemn us or be angry with us because he fancies he sees himself reflected in our writings.

As I said in the preceding chapter, the young writer often makes the mistake of thinking he must use material in just the form he finds it. He tries to photograph what he sees. If he succeeds his photograph is at once recognized and he finds himself in trouble the minute his story or article appears in print. If you are depicting a pitfall into which a real man tumbled in order that other real men may recognize similar pitfalls when they come upon them in real life, there is no need for you to show all the first man's physical and mental peculiarities so that all his world will recognize him. All you need to do is point out how such a road and such a manner of traveling will mean dropping into a ditch or quagmire. The color of the first man's horse or the number on his automobile license or the kind of a coat he had on is of no moment to the reader and should not be reproduced.

I have alluded to Holmes' "A Mortal Antipathy" and imagined Holmes as having found the germ of his idea in an antipathy of one of his patients. I have shown how the germ was perhaps developed into the interesting plot idea of Holmes' novel. In all of Holmes' writings it is easy to trace the physician and the physician's experiences. But I've never heard Holmes accused of abusing professional confidences or making public that which should have been sacred

to him. I think the reason is that Holmes knew how to reproduce without the aid of a camera. He could portray that which was vital to his purpose and discard or alter the rest past recognition. If Elsie Venner had been a real girl with Elsie's peculiar weakness and a patient of Dr. Holmes, Holmes would have been inexcusable, because his story would have revealed family secrets, told in confidence to the trusted family physician. The fact that Holmes was a writer as well as a doctor would in no way have exonerated him for abusing professional confidence. A man has no right to misuse one talent because he happens to have been given two. Holmes undoubtedly found the material for Elsie Venner in his own professional experience or in that of some fellow-physician but he was careful to work what he found over and over until it was altered beyond recognition.

Is an author ever justified in depicting weaknesses and peculiarities he has discovered in real life, when he knows his material will sooner or later be traced to the persons who furnished it? The mass must always count above the individual and even though the individual may suffer I think the author should utter his message, if it be vital, and shut his ears to the clamor he may raise. I suppose many a young idealist has tumbled Dickens off his pedestal when he learned that this loved author did not scruple to use as material the weaknesses of his father and mother and wife. But let the idealist remember that Dickens was not writing "for fun" or for money,

though he undoubtedly did get both fun and money out of his work. Always his aim was high and pure, to check abuses, to make laziness, selfishness, hypocrisy despicable and to exalt industry, unselfishness, loyalty, real piety. The fact that Dickens' books have been more successful as sermons than as farces should justify him in the eyes of those who can see beyond the rights of the individual to the needs of the race.

And those we love best; shall we put them into our manuscripts, expose that which is so sacred to us to a staring, curious public? In "Margaret Ogilvie" the mother exults that her son cannot "keep her out" of his books. What higher compliment could her son pay her than that she was so constantly in his thoughts and withal so interesting he could not "keep her out"?

When "Margaret Ogilvie" first came out a man who greatly admired Barrie said to me that the sketch seemed almost sacrilege. A minute later he pulled the book out of his pocket.

"Why, I thought we had your copy!" I said in surprise.

"You have one," the man replied, laughing a little shamefacedly, "but I went into a book store and bought another. I felt homesick without 'Margaret Ogilvie'!"

It's worth giving one's mother to the public to have another man homesick for her.

In deciding what personal material we can use we can hardly do better than guide ourselves by sound business principles: We should not traffic in that which is not our own or which was ob-

tained by unfair means; we should not wantonly profit at the expense of others. Our business, however small and insignificant, should be conducted with a view to the general welfare rather than with a selfish determination to get out of it all we possibly can for our own profit and pleasure.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Author's Personal Responsibility

IF in any previous chapter I have given the impression that only good manuscripts sell I have said what I did not mean to say and what is certainly not true. Poor stories and articles and poems sell just as poor cloth and poor furniture and poor candy do. There are always people who would rather pay one dollar for a poor article than two dollars for one four times as good as well as people who really like cheap things. Moreover, it is never difficult to find a man who would rather have a bottle of cheap whiskey than a loaf of good bread. If your manuscripts are good of their kind they may be of a very poor kind and sell. Also, if they are of a kind to satisfy a poor class of readers they may be very poor, even of their kind, and sell.

If only good manuscripts sold the author would not have to worry at all about the question of his personal responsibility as an artist and a producer. If he could sell his manuscripts he could then feel sure that they were worthy of publication. But since there are readers who prefer that which is weak or vicious and publishers willing to make money by gratifying weak and vicious tastes the burden of responsibility lies heavy

upon the shoulders of the author. The fact that the public likes Mutt and Jeff and that these gentlemen have no difficulty in finding purchasers does not excuse the creator of Mutt and Jeff for bringing so much vulgarity and ugliness into existence.

There are two kinds of responsibility which the author cannot escape, his responsibility as an artist and his responsibility as a wide-spreading influence for good or evil.

There are hundreds of young writers, sound to the core morally and eager to do good in the world, who seem to have no appreciation of the meaning of "art for art's sake." They lack what we may call the workman's conscience. Many an ignorant fellow, plowing his furrow straight or planing his board smooth, is far more of an artist than these careless writers, content with "any old way" which will pass with the editor. To have my work as nearly perfect as I can make it just because it is my work: this is the spirit which gives any task dignity and which should surely pervade the mind of the writer as he produces that which he hopes will have lasting existence.

A few years ago a friend brought to my home an old English poet who was writing for the American magazines. We were having a very delightful evening when someone happened to mention a poem of the Englishman's which had recently appeared in *Munsey's Magazine*. Munsey's editor, it seemed, had cut out two of the poet's stanzas. As he told us about the cutting

the old man's sorrow and wrath became so great that he had great difficulty in controlling himself and, realizing his condition, he hastily ended his call. The acceptance, the check and the seeing of his poem in print had in no way compensated this true artist for what seemed to him the mutilation of his work.

To the very practical man the poet's suffering may look like mere egotism and morbid sensitiveness about one's own production. But it was something higher than that. Back of art there is always the great Artist, the supreme Idealist, if I may so express myself. The true artist, therefore, whether he be consciously religious or not, reverences his ideal. He cannot help but suffer in seeing the work which he had labored to render perfect taken from or added to or altered in any way.

To the true artist it is a solemn thing to reproduce life. To depict God's sky as it never was or will be seems to the artist-painter a crime against the Creator—or, he may tell you, against art. A poem or a story that gives a distorted representation of human nature should seem to the author a crime, not only against art but against the Creator of men and the One who took upon Himself the form of a man. Whether we call ourselves workmen or artists, therefore, we are inexcusable if the product of our hand is less than our reverent best.

When we have satisfied our workman's conscience we have still to face the question of our moral responsibility; for, as I have said, we can-

not expect the public or the publisher to reject what we offer merely because it is not good as a moral influence.

All of us have heard or read of boys who were led to leave home by reading stories which made joining a circus or becoming a cowboy or just "seeing life" picturesque and delightful. Many a girl, we know, has been tempted into trying the artist life of New York or Paris through reading stories which made this life seem romantic and desirable. On the other hand, Weigle, an authority on Sunday School pedagogy, claims that the child may be given a distaste for the religious life by stories which are "goody-goody," that is, stories which are religiously insincere.

We do not need any knowledge of psychology to convince us of the power of suggestion. The boy in our own home dashes into the house and demands his skates because he has caught sight of another boy joyously gliding over the asphalt. We who are older have gone "down cellar" for an apple for no better reason than that we happened to see somebody else munching one. And every housewife knows that it is possible to give a person a lasting distaste for a dish by once serving it under-cooked or too highly flavored. Our common sense must tell us, then, that we are not guiltless when we write stories which give a false idea of life, which depict evil so that it seems good, or good so that it seems flat, nauseous, anything but wholesome and desirable.

A girl of twelve heard that in China a man sometimes commits suicide upon the door-step of

his enemy. Coming into an older sister's room one winter evening she found the girl laboriously working away upon a little dress intended for her. The child stood looking on a moment and then she snatched the garment out of the patient seamstress' hand. "You stop ruining your eyes for me!" she commanded excitedly. "You shan't kill yourself on my door-step!"

Men will kill themselves, whether we have injured them or not. People will read cheap, harmful stories, whether you and I write them or not. But we can see to it that no one reads a harmful story of ours, that no person's moral decadence or death lies at our door.

What shall we write, good, clean humor with a healthy laugh in it to leave the reader better both physically and morally; sincere pathos to sweeten and purify the soul; adventure that exalts industry and intelligence and courage and makes honor and manly courtesy admirable and desirable; or vulgar, debasing horse-play, unreal yet depressing tragedies, lurid adventures which so confuses the reader that he cannot tell right from wrong, courage from foolhardiness, skill and good business sense from trickery and dishonesty?

To return to my figure: What shall we place upon our shelves, that which is good, clean, wholesome, durable, or that which is lacking in nutriment, perishable, impure? No matter how small and insignificant our shop may be, if we sell our goods, we shall affect the lives of those who buy

of us and of others who never come within our doors.

It seems a solemn thing to write for publication when we realize how far the printed page can travel. There's a certain immortality, too, in print. Will Carleton ends one of his best-known poems with these lines:

"Boys flying kites haul in their white-winged birds;
You can't do that way when you're flying words.

.....
Thoughts unexpressed may sometimes fall back dead;
But God Himself can't kill them when they're said!"

Written words are even harder to kill than those that are spoken.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Editors

A YOUNG woman who sells her manuscripts saw the outline for this book. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I wish you'd have circulars about it scattered all through the country villages! Do you know, when I began trying to write I didn't understand that there were books on authorship? I didn't even know there were magazines on purpose for writers. I don't suppose you'll believe it, but when I was quite a big girl I thought the editors wrote all there was in each magazine! Is it any wonder I didn't know how to get a start?"

I don't suppose there are very many young girls with literary aspirations as unsophisticated as this, but I find that a very great many new writers have very erroneous ideas about the editors. If they could correct these they would not only be very much more comfortable in their minds, but they would stand a very much better chance of succeeding with these same editors.

I once received a letter from a man who referred to the editors as those "whose business it is to discourage and whose pleasure to insult writers." Now an editor can no more afford to make enemies of the writers than a theatrical manager can afford to make enemies of the actors and actresses. The manager can't keep his theatre open unless he has someone to play. The editor can't publish his magazine unless

he has someone to write. His business is producing a magazine that the public will think worth buying; his pleasure is the finding of material which will help to make up such a magazine. He should be approached not as a god in whose hands are the issues of life and death, not as a friend who can do you a favor if he will, but as a business man. If he rejects your offering he does so for just one reason: He believes it will be of no help to him in producing the magazine his patrons want.

"Why can't he explain then?" explodes some indignant young writer. "How long would it take him to write a courteous little personal note, pointing out why he believes the manuscript wouldn't please his readers? I wouldn't mind getting my stories back if it weren't for those nasty little rejection slips, which explain nothing!"

It doesn't take very long to write one little note; it takes a good deal of time to write fifty or a hundred or a thousand. When a busy foreman advertises for a boy and he has fifty applicants he doesn't take each one of the forty-nine by the hand and explain just why he can't employ him; if the applications are in writing the foreman doesn't spend a whole evening answering them. He may be the kindest, most courteous man in his city, but he wouldn't consider it a good investment of his time to spend it pointing out the scientific deficiencies of the unsuccessful applicants or in explaining why the successful applicant seemed to him more suited to his needs.

If some young woman writer is interrupted in her writing or her baking by the ringing of the bell and finds a salesman or peddler smiling on her doorstep she doesn't take him into her study or kitchen and explain just why she doesn't need a machine or a cake of soap. If she says courteously, "Not today!" she feels that she has done her whole duty. Why should she let her cake burn or her precious idea fly out of the window while she is discussing something she doesn't want with a person whose only interest in her lies in the fact that she may have money to spend? You can't expect a business man to give you very much of anything for nothing, whether it's time or writing-paper or sympathy.

The editor is pretty sure to fend you off with rejection slips until he is convinced that he may want to "do business" with you, if not just now, then at some other time. If he finds that you have taken the trouble to get into sympathy with his policy he will usually show his appreciation by personal notes, as kindly as they are sincere and explanatory.

I remember a time when two magazines seemed to me particularly unapproachable. I had tried each a number of times and had had my offerings rejected with printed letters that some way seemed to hurl me down to the foot of an iceberg, cold, immense, unscalable. Then one day I happened upon a copy of a little magazine for authors published by Mr. Hills, and in this was a letter to contributors, written by the editor of one of the two inaccessibles. It explained just

what kind of manuscripts the editor wanted. I tried hard to produce that kind. After that the editor invariably either wrote me a cordial note of acceptance or an equally cordial note, explaining just why he was returning my manuscript.

The second magazine was a "big" one. I had sent it only an occasional manuscript; I had a kind of horror of those lengthy printed letters of rejection. But I happened upon some material that I felt might really satisfy the editors. I gathered it into three articles and respectfully submitted them for examination, and, behold, I had called forth a by no means brief personal letter! The editor explained that he had use for only a part of the material; he offered me a very satisfactory sum for that part, with the understanding that he was to keep the whole series and pick out what he wanted, I to be free to use what was left over as I chose. I accepted the offer, supposing of course, that I should have to wait until the publication of the available matter before I could remold and attempt to market the rest. But soon after my check arrived the editor sent me all the sheets or parts of sheets he had decided not to use and told me I was now at liberty to proceed with the material as I saw fit. I promptly regrouped it and soon had a second check almost as large as the first to show for my series.

When next I had occasion to address the editor of the inaccessible publication I thanked him for his thoughtfulness in returning the left-over material at once and told him that I had been

able to sell it promptly to a certain rival magazine. He replied, expressing great pleasure in the sale. Since that he has not only invariably sent me a personal letter with every acceptance or returned manuscript but almost always acknowledges the receipt of anything I offer him with a cordial personal note, expressing a hope that my contribution will prove available and telling me about how soon I may hope for a report.

I have in my desk a three-page letter in long-hand from an editor who not only was willing to explain why he couldn't use an article of mine, but wanted to convert me to believing just as he did about the matter under discussion! Back of the rejection there is always the individual business man, but back of the business man there is always a personality, sometimes suave and sometimes gruff, but usually, I think, kindly, and never, I am sure, a monster of cruelty or ignorance.

A correspondent wrote me that he understood it was impossible to sell manuscripts unless one had "a pull" with the editor through some friends or relatives. Again and again the young writers want to know if it's possible to succeed without having "a big name."

I once offered an editor with whom I was associated a manuscript of my own. In my office work I had tried in every possible way to please him and he had shown himself happy to do me a personal favor. Ten days after my manuscript was submitted I was told that it had been accepted. "But," said the editor, "if it hadn't

been what I wanted I'd have turned it down without mercy! I never allow my personal interest in a contributor to affect my editorial judgment."

I saw a letter of his to a fellow editor in which he stated that he never glanced at the name upon a manuscript until he had occasion to address the author.

One day a young man who assisted the president of our concern brought into the office two manuscripts which he said had been written by a certain author. Her name is so well-known that I think every reader of my book would recognize it if I gave it. I read the manuscripts, wondered if it could be possible that the young man had written them himself and then laid them on the editor's desk. There was no name on them and I left Billy, the young man, to make his own explanation.

A few hours afterwards the editor tossed the two manuscripts on my desk. "Read those," he told me, "and then guess who wrote them."

I bent over the manuscripts for a while and then glanced up as innocently as I could. "I guess _____," I announced.

The editor stared at me for a moment, and then he laughed. "Oh," he exclaimed, "somebody told you!"

But he was a red-headed editor and after he'd thought about the manuscripts a little longer he grew angry. "The idea of her sending us such stuff as that!" he burst out. "Tell Billy we don't want 'em at any price! If she has anything worth

while to show us we'll be glad to look it over, but we're not printing trash for anybody!"

I'm not claiming that a name counts for nothing. Of course it does. If a well-known writer sends in a good story and a brand-new writer sends in one just as good but no better, of course the editor will take the one by the well-known writer. There are two good reasons for his doing so. If he chooses the story by the unknown writer he must depend entirely upon his own judgment, which may not be correct; if he chooses the famous writer he is supported by the judgment of a great many other editors and thousands of readers. His stronger reason, however, is the advertising value of the "big name."

A club to which I belong has been giving a series of musical recitals. We've had Shumann-Heink, Gadski, Ysaye, Paderewski. We've had to pay each one a thousand dollars or more. But we've taken in over two thousand dollars at each concert. We didn't have to explain to our fellow-citizens that Shumann-Heink and Gadski could sing and Ysaye and Paderewski could play. The names were a guarantee that the entertainments would be worth spending money on.

A minister told me that while he was in the theological seminary he spent his vacation time working in a saw factory, and one night the employes gathered in a hall and gave an impromptu concert. Among the performers was a tenor who sang so pleasingly that the end of his part was the signal for vociferous applause. When the man did not hasten back to the plat-

form someone, fearing that the next number would be given, called, "*Encore! Encore!*"

This did not meet the view of a new employe, an Englishman, who rose in his seat and said loudly: "*Encore* be hanged! Let the same chap sing again!"

Often the editor would like to print a story that pleases him and suppress one that personally he does not like at all. But he thinks of the reader who will scan the cover page of his magazine in search of the very name he's tempted to omit and if that name isn't there buy the other editor's magazine. It's the public's rather than the editor's fault that "the same chap" is allowed to come before the footlights so often.

After you're near the top, remembering the long, hard, what David Graham Phillips called the "sweaty" climb, you'll see some fairness in the "big name" helping to win acceptances and more fame. You won't think it unfair that you receive five cents a word when the new writer receives only one or fifteen cents when he can't get more than three. It would seem to you very unjust if any newcomer could snatch your hardly won success out of your hand before you'd had time even to taste its sweetness.

Remember for your comfort that all writers were new once. It may be true that "poets are born and not made," but it is just as true that no writer is born famous. I can remember the first time I had a book of Barrie's handed me and the first time I heard the name Rudyard Kipling. A great admirer of Stevenson told me that the first

book of Stevenson's he read was *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. He bought the book on a train, while coming home after a professional visit out of town, and he said that the story made such a powerful impression upon him (though the name of the author meant nothing to him at that time) that he walked up and down the aisle of the car to give vent to his agitation. We all have the same avenues of approach to the editors and to the public as those open to Barrie or Stevenson or Kipling. If no new writer could succeed we English-speaking nations would have but one book in our own tongue; we should have nothing to peruse but the work of the father of our literature, the revered Boerwolf.

Far be it from me to declare the editor infallible. Being human, it stands to reason that his judgment is imperfect. Mr. McClure tells us that when Kipling brought his entire output to America and offered it to Harper and Brothers it was rejected to the last manuscript. But we writers oughtn't to feel superior over that bit of mis-judgment. Some of us fail to find anything in Kipling's poems, some of us wonder what our parents saw in Jane Austen, and some of us, I very much fear, don't read our Shakespeare for pleasure.

Take what consolation you can in the editor's fallibility but don't be angry or spiteful when he rejects your manuscript. And don't be despairing. There are a good many editors in the literary world and you have reason to expect

that some day one of them will appreciate whatever real merit your work has.

If the "Big Four" won't buy your manuscripts it doesn't follow that they won't sell to the smaller fellows, and perhaps the readers of the smaller magazines are just as well worth reaching as those who subscribe for the Century and Scribner's and Harper's and the Atlantic Monthly. If, as you claim, your chief reason for writing is that you have something to say it should not so much matter what sort of a platform you stand on or how your hearers are dressed or how much remuneration you receive, so long as you can gain an audience.

One of Longfellow's characters says to another: "If you find a lady who pleases you very much and you want to marry her and she will not listen to such a horrid proposition I see but one thing for you to do, and that is to find another lady who pleases you still more and who will listen to it."

If one editor won't accept your offering proceed to pay court to another one, your courage still up and your heart still whole.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Criticism

THERE are a great many writers who ask and even pay for criticism but comparatively few, I have come to fear, who profit appreciably by it after it is given. I could devote a pretty large volume to anecdotes about writers who asked for an honest opinion and then were furiously angry or deeply hurt when such an opinion was forthcoming.

If you want sympathy seek out some friend who always thinks you right and show him your manuscript. If you want a sincere expression of opinion go to some person, preferably not an intimate friend, who is known never to say what he does not mean, or pay some professional critic with a reputation for honesty to tell you what he thinks of your work. Insincere or undeserved praise may give you pleasure but it will not help you to sell your manuscript. If you cannot bear the pain of having your faults pointed out to you or are so cocksure of yourself that nothing any man can say will alter your opinion of your work don't waste money or your friends' time. If after all you do not want criticism don't ask for it and don't pay for it. Certainly it is not good business sense to pay a man for an opinion and then be very angry because he has been honest enough to risk losing your patronage by giving you just what you have paid him for. It is not

good common sense to ask an acquaintance to tell you what he thinks of your story or article or poem and then treat his remarks with contempt or indifference because they are not all praise.

I believe that almost any expression of opinion is valuable, providing it is sincere. We are not writing for ourselves and what any other person thinks of our work is perhaps of more importance than what we ourselves think of it. To see ourselves as others will see us is the important matter, whether it is a question of a costume or a manuscript. Can the average person follow me without effort? Does my theme stand out as I hoped it would? Will the average reader be touched by my pathos or amused by my humor? These are questions which may be satisfactorily answered by showing your manuscript to any honest person, representative of the class of readers your story or article or poem is intended to please. Even though the chosen person is timid in expressing an opinion he will unconsciously tell you what you ought to know before you have talked with him many minutes.

I once showed a young girl from the country a specimen of my typewriting. I had just begun to use a typewriter and I rather hungered for approbation. The girl looked at my neat sheets, evidently trying to think of some appropriate and pleasing comment. Then she said enthusiastically, "How lovely and clear your periods are."

Every graduate of a business college will ap-

preciate the fact that she had unconsciously given me a bit of criticism which I did well to heed. If the young woman who reads your moral uplift story seems especially impressed with how well trained your heroine's butler was see what you can do toward suppressing the butler.

I once criticised a dainty little sketch about a very feminine young person whom a young man was taking to his mother for inspection. The author wrote us later that our unconscious criticism had been of more value than that we had painstakingly made. He said we evidently thought the young man was taking home his *fiancée*, whereas he was really acting as escort to a beautiful Angora kitten!

If your friend says innocently, "Well, what became of your hero?" when you thought you had allowed the young man to die of fatigue on page 15 you'd better see if page 15 doesn't need re-writing. If he fails even to smile at your culmination of humor ask yourself if the average reader would "see the point." Will your child's story hold your little brother or daughter? Or does your eager listener grow restless near the middle or drop asleep against your knee just as you reach your climax? Does your friend's gardener smile over your article on the growing of plums which you had thought so interesting and practicable?

There are a hundred ways in which a writer may obtain a glimpse of his work without asking for a definite expression of opinion. Sooner or

later, however, most of us want to hear in so many words what some other person thinks of our efforts. I want to give a word of warning to the writer who is sincerely anxious to know the truth: Don't ask an opinion unless you have some reason to think it will be worth something to you, and don't look upon one person's opinion as equivalent to a consensus of opinion from all the intelligent readers in your country, and don't reject an opinion after it has been conscientiously given until you have some definite proof that it is worthless. Always be open to suggestions for improving your work but cling as to a life-preserver to the faith you have in yourself.

I went to college with the fixed belief that I had ability as a writer. I had chosen my profession farther back than I could remember, and all the teachers I had had in primary, grammar and high school had praised my compositions. But when I entered college I encountered an instructor who thought my themes very poor indeed. No matter what the subject, my carefully written papers elicited only adverse comments and poor marks. I tried hard to correct the defects pointed out to me but apparently I made no progress in my instructor's favor. I grew confused and discouraged. Then I began to look into my own case with impartial eyes. I remembered that teachers older and with apparently quite as wide a knowledge of English as my new instructor had praised my work and that I had even sold some articles. I resolved to try one of my themes with that critic before

whom my work, if I was to write for publication, must all pass, the editor. To my keen delight the theme sold. My faith in myself was restored.

Later I came into contact with Dr. Krapp of Columbia University, and his criticisms put new life as well as ideas into me. Every adverse comment he made seemed just, and every word of praise seemed sincere. But suppose I'd allowed myself to be discouraged by the first man, undoubtedly quite as conscientious as Dr. Krapp? I'd have given up my one great ambition and today I should be working at some uncongenial task instead of happily laying down the law to those whose aspirations and tastes run side by side with my own.

Let your faith in yourself be built upon a common-sense foundation and then consider each criticism dispassionately. Have you in your manuscript so considered the mistakes pointed out to you? Was your critic right in declaring that you had never studied the principles of style? It is true that your manuscript cost you only an hour's hasty effort, though you had hoped to sell it to the *Atlantic Monthly* or the *Century*? Was his guess that you had just been reading *Les Misérables* correct? What should concern you is the truth. If you have faults you want to know them. If your work has merit you want to understand where it lies. Listen to each criticism offered you with a mind free from prejudice, always yearning to reach your highest possibilities as a writer and not at all concerned with small jealousies and wounds to your pride. If

your critic's adverse comments are well-founded be grateful for them, make them a part of your working knowledge and attack your next manuscript better equipped than you were before. Test your criticism, not to argue with your critic or to prove to yourself that you know more than he does, but to determine whether or not his comments are justified by the defects and merits in your manuscript.

Let me illustrate what I mean by testing a criticism. A fellow-critic showed me a letter he had received from a courteous patron, asking for an explanation. The patron enclosed a very correct and attractive manuscript and said it was representative of his work in general; yet he had just received a criticism from my colleague, stating that one of his manuscripts was *not correct and inviting*. I pondered the letter for a moment and then it flashed across my mind that in short-hand *not* and *neat* look very much alike. What the critic had said was, "Your manuscript is neat, correct and inviting." The error was the stenographer's.

I once examined a very carefully written and readable manuscript and was disappointed to find that the ending was wholly lacking in point. Apparently the author had the ability to write entertainingly but did not know how to reach a climax. I wrote as helpful a criticism as I could, wondering a little that so intelligent a man as the writer seemed to be should have tried to write a story with such poor material. In a few days I received an apologetic letter, thanking me for

having taken so much pains with so unsatisfactory a manuscript and explaining that the author had neglected to enclose all of the pages. As it happened that the last page I examined formed a sort of conclusion to the narrative I had not guessed that some of the manuscript was missing.

Both of the writers I have just discussed were not only gentlemen but they were sensible. Instead of becoming very indignant at what was manifestly unwarranted criticism they compared their manuscripts with the letters concerning them and so had little difficulty in finding the cause of the discrepancy.

In writing a manuscript that involves knowledge of some special sort, of which you have only a limited amount a word of criticism is often invaluable. A man who has been dean of technology in one of our well-known colleges told me that frequently a sermon was spoiled for him because of some unscientific illustration or statement on the part of the preacher. A doctor told me that some of the stories he read struck him as positively absurd when it came to a scene involving an accident or an illness.

An Episcopalian sister once wrote me, asking that I consult her if I wished to describe anything involving an intimate knowledge of her church. "Recently," she wrote, "a Boston newspaper described a great Episcopalian service, in which 'the acolytes were suspended from the ceiling.' I am sure you would never put an acolyte in so painful a position but nevertheless

you may make a mistake which would spoil your story for an Episcopalian reader if you do not first show it to one of us."

The writer who has a friend willing to glance over a paragraph or a scene or a whole article or story involving knowledge of some special subject will do well to avail himself of this friend's counsel. If we have the spirit of the true artist we want our work to be perfect, even though the matter we are considering involves nothing more vital to our main idea than the setting of a bird's leg or the placing of a candle.

I believe the youngest writer should depend upon himself for all the actual work involved in producing a manuscript for publication. Planning, punctuating, paragraphing, revising and even the copying may all well be done by the young writer eager to reach his highest possibilities in the realm of authorship. But the most experienced author may profit by criticism. It takes a man with a pretty long neck to get a view of himself from all four sides. Criticism shows us our work as others see it, and if we receive it with open minds it will free us "frae monie a blunder and foolish notion."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Help from Other Writers

IF you have not even a foothold on the literary ladder there is little use in entreating those who have to help you up and threatening to pull them down by the heels if they won't. The man who tries this plan certainly deserves a few exasperated kicks.

If I were just starting out the last person I would ask to read my manuscript would be the successful author who happened to be on my list of acquaintances. If a man is writing, not for fun but for his living, he usually leaves his desk weary of the world of words and sentences, figures of speech and imaginary characters. He needs a rest just as surely as the man who has been working all day with pick and shovel needs relief for his tired muscles. If you had a day laborer on your list of acquaintances you wouldn't think of asking him to spade up your garden for you so you could see how he did it or because you wanted it spaded up.

Even if he has plenty of time and strength to give you, moreover, the successful author is not always a good judge of another author's work. Because a man can write it does not follow that he is a fair-minded, helpful critic. Personally I'd rather know what some intelligent fellow without literary aspirations thinks of my article

or story than what Marie Corelli or Rudyard Kipling might have to say about it.

How, then, are we to profit by the vast fund of experience and information which the successful writer has gained? By reading his printed works. Between the lines of many a novel lies a whole text-book on authorship for the eager young writer's perusal.

Take Barrie's "When a Man's Single." The book is so full of suggestions for the journalist that Barrie might have written it on purpose for him. It makes the discouraged writer laugh a good, wholesome laugh at himself; it reveals to him that he is "not the only pebble" that has dropped prone and despairing on the beach; and it tells in very plain language what sort of effort has met with success. If the book is closed without leaving a mind eager to express itself in a new manuscript the reader may be a story-teller or a poet but I take no odds on his chances as a journalist.

Most of us slip off our shoes in the presence of *Margaret Ogilvie*, but it is to her that Barrie opens his heart. The book tells of his first attempts, of struggles and failures and success. There is a warm, soft light that shines from the heart of the sympathetic writer. It falls on common things and makes them beautiful. This is the secret which Barrie has revealed in *Margaret Ogilvie*.

Tommy and Grizel utters some very definite advice to the writer, either young or practised. Indeed, Barrie has been so generous with bits

of information, suggestion and experience dealing with the profession of authorship that I have sometimes wondered if he has not purposely scattered these white scraps along his path that other writers may the more easily follow him to the coveted goal.

A Modern Instance gives us a talk with Howells. It shows where an energetic, open-eyed man may find "copy." It shows that there is always room for such a man, even among a crowd of experienced journalists. And it teaches very clearly the importance of an honest policy. Moral obligations, Howells assures us, are facts which it is not safe for the writer to ignore.

Black's *Shandon Bells* is another book for the new writer. The first half, at least, is a direct message from a man who has known defeat and, again, success. It may be improbable and disappointing as a novel, but as a text-book for the new writer *Shandon Bells* is not to be overlooked.

George Mandeville's Husband, a book that most people have forgotten, has a word for the woman writer. It is not a remarkable book but it is well worth the would-be author's attention. George Mandeville succeeds but, succeeding, brings reproach upon her profession. Better not to write than neglect the work God has given you to do, is the advice one finds in *George Mandeville's Husband*.

In striking contrast to *George Mandeville's Husband* is *Kavanagh*, a book of prose poetry to most of us and no more. The sin of yielding to

natural laziness, to the weakening influences of present environment; this is the text of Longfellow's sermon. As the character who illustrates the sermon is a man who goes on teaching after it is quite plain that he ought to be writing the book has an important place on my list. *Kavanagh* should have something to say, if to a very small audience.

I have given only a very few of the books containing valuable hints and information for the new writer. It is so natural to want to write one's own experiences that almost every famous writer has dropped suggestions into his stories which the beginner may ponder to his lasting profit. How did he begin? How did she first get into print? How did they know they had talent? These are natural questions. The answers are to be found in print rather than in interviews or personal letters.

I found a great deal to interest me in Mr. McClure's *Autobiography* beside the pleasing anecdotes and discussions of great men and women. Why did Mr. McClure succeed with a series of articles on cooking? Not because, like most husbands, he had theories as to how bread and pie and cake should be made, but because he had studied the work of the cook at the Astor House and received valuable information and suggestions from him. There are other autobiographies beside Mr. McClure's. Maybe in some of them you can find answers to all the questions you would ask "if only" you could

secure a personal interview with the writers whose success you covet.

We need not "pester" our literary friends with questions as to how to begin and how to find material and how to win recognition when so many valuable books beside those under "Books on Authorship" lie ready for our perusal. If we are business-like in our attitude toward our work we will not ask another man to "stock us up," supply us with advertising ideas, to send us customers. We may study his methods carefully but we will not appeal directly to him.

A bright woman relative of mine has for her motto: "What man has done woman can do." And I have often watched her demonstrate that what one man has done one woman can do quite as well. As we use the hints the old writers give us let us cheer ourselves with the thought that what the other fellow has done cannot be impossible.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

When You're Tempted to Shut Up Shop

OF all the adverse conditions that the writer has to contend with I think the most terrible is the black discouragement which is pretty sure to grip him after repeated rejections of a manuscript about which he had felt particularly hopeful. I have in mind now, not the author who is failing because his work is poor, but the conscientious and talented writer who is doing his level best and whose best is good; the high-grade writer who will succeed some day but whose courage is failing because success is so long deferred.

I believe if we could talk to all the great authors, those who have won real successes, each would tell us that he was grateful for his failures. The beginner who sells all he writes is usually tempted into writing what is not worth reading. The author who is goaded on by failures is the one whose standard rises and whose success, when won, is lasting.

More than one high-salaried stenographer has told me that she owed her success to a difficult first position. Because she had to exert all her powers to fill her first position she gained a speed and accuracy and self-reliance that set her a high personal standard and that won her continued success. The writer who sells his hastily

written manuscript for a fair price is usually content to go on producing hastily written manuscripts, while the writer who can sell only the results of long and careful effort acquires the habit of good work and in the end outstrips his more speedy rival.

Some years ago I found among the books chosen for me to while away an enforced vacation one by a new author. I glanced languidly at the first paragraph and then lost myself. I finished the book very early in the morning of the next day. When I returned to the city I procured all the other books this author had written. There were only two; each was up to the standard of the first book. A year or so later I again found opportunity for some light reading and, seeing on a newsstand a paper-covered book which bore my author's name, I hastily purchased it, though I did not remember having heard the title mentioned. I had to force myself to read the story through.

The first books were carefully planned and executed. They were full of thoughtful sentences, odd, attractive conceits and forceful interpretations of character. Each seemed finished, though it was early work. In none of the three had the author depended upon natural ability to see her safely through. The last book was carelessly thrown together, yet it seemed laborious. It was unconvincing in plot and in characterization. As I read I ceased to wonder that while a few years ago the author's name was on every tongue, it was now no longer mentioned. A few

successes, one after another, had made the writer believe that she could sell all she wrote and she had promptly ceased to give only her best thought to her stories. Except for her first three books she will rank among the failures, despite the fact that she has unusual natural talent.

It is a recognized law that growth comes with effort. We raise heavy weights and develop our muscles. We climb hills and our circulation quickens. We are all well aware that if we spent our youth being trundled about in baby-carriages we should never have the strength of men and women. We need to be buffeted, to find our profession hard in order to develop the strength which expresses itself in worthy stories and articles and poems. Browning's stirring lines seem to be peculiarly adapted to the discouraged, storm-tossed writer:

"Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!"

Longfellow has a character say: "It has done me good to be parched by the sun and drenched by the dews of life."

It is only the man who gives up the struggle who does not learn to be glad that he was called upon to suffer it. The writer who responds to Browning's "Go!" though with sore feet and aching back will live to be glad with Browning and Longfellow that a part of the way at least was rough and toilsome.

Even when he is succeeding or when he is able to take his failures philosophically the writer is

usually prone to periods of dark discouragement. Long after the world had begun to recognize Stevenson as a genius he described himself in a letter to a friend as having "the black dog hard after" him. I'm afraid there's no doubt that days of depression, generally following days of high courage and exalted hopes, are natural to the author as they are to other artists. Moreover, it seems that from the great Master down no man has been able to accomplish a special task for mankind without his moment of hopelessness and a bitter sense of failure. The law of compensation seems to demand that he who is to know unusual joy, such as comes from having given birth to something strong and beautiful, must also suffer unusual pain.

Let the writer on whom life seems to have been unnecessarily hard and who envies his neighbor's smooth existence remember that one must suffer in order to understand and portray and be of service. All that the writer suffers bravely, whether physical pain or personal loss or the grievous disappointment of seeming failure with his work, goes to the making up of the strong character which alone is fit to guide and support and succor others.

But you want to succeed! Surely you do. And the higher and more worthy your endeavor the more it behooves you to desire to succeed. The man who has given his best thought and his best work in ten manuscripts and received them all back without a word of editorial encouragement may be forgiven for crying out with another

poor man, "Oh, Lord, try me with a little success!"

Writing for publication is a business: we must never forget that in admitting and caring for the artistic side of our natures and our work. Take out the manuscript which seemed to you particularly promising and look at it with your business sense keenly awake. Is the title attractive, the sort of title that would make any reader, even an editor, eager to see what suggested it? Is the introduction crisp and clear, pleasing enough to carry on what the title began and entice the reader into the body of the story? In other words, do your title and introduction suggest how really good your manuscript is?

How about your copy? Does it still look fresh and clean or does it indicate that it has been travelling about from editor to editor?

What about your list of markets? Do you know the magazines to which you have been sending your manuscripts? Are you sure the last one you tried uses stories as long as yours or any poems or articles of the type yours is?

Examine your manuscript just as though it were not yours but that of an unknown contributor to your magazine, the magazine which you were so eager to see succeed. If your manuscript is just as good as you can make it in every way and your list seems to you the best you could use, go on sending your contribution out. Put it into a fresh envelope with another brief, courteous note and then mail it and "forget it," and,

having forgotten it, begin a new manuscript with fresh interest and fresh courage.

Don't think you must rewrite your manuscript every time it comes back. There is such a thing as putting too much work on a manuscript. Don't polish your story or article or poem until you rub off all its freshness and naturalness. Some authors write and rewrite a composition until they lose their power to see it correctly and also their power to produce anything else. Don't spend so much time trying to discover why one manuscript has not sold that you have only one manuscript to dispose of.

The Preacher says: "In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good." Perhaps you have been trying a class of work which is not just fitted to your natural powers. You may have a keen sense of humor and still be able to write far better serious stories than humorous ones. You may like to write poetry and still do better work in the line of prose. Perhaps you have been writing books when you have had material only for short stories or your experience has not yet warranted you in attempting long fiction. If you have failed with one class of writing try something a bit different. Because you have had only barren results in one field it does not follow that another will not yield you a plentiful harvest.

Do not give up your dearest hopes because they are not realized easily, because success can-

not be won by a few spasmodic, if vigorous, efforts. When discouragement seizes you meet it with such high spirit and withal such intelligence that you will be all the stronger and better for having had to grapple with it.

To revert once more to my figure: Don't put up your shutters because the public has not yet become aware that you have opened a shop. Polish your windows, rearrange your wares and add some fresh, attractive goods to your stock. Your'e in business to succeed. If you know what you have to offer is better than anything the man on the next block has to sell it would be wrong as well as foolish of you to let him put you out of business or get the greater part of the trade.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Business of Writing—A Summing Up

IN 1910 the Associated Sunday Magazines and the Delineator offered prizes for short stories. The sums were large enough to tempt the famous writers and to dazzle the minds of people with "a knack for writing" but who had never succeeded in selling a story. As it was my business to criticise manuscripts I was given a first reading of many of the stories to be entered for these prizes, and the experience made me wish harder than ever that I could persuade the new writers to look at their chosen profession in a business-like way.

\$2500 is a good deal of money; and so is \$2,000; and so is \$300 a good deal of money. It is a generally accepted truth that nobody wants to pay something for nothing. It looks very much, then, as though to secure a \$2500 prize in a short story contest one would have to write a \$2500 short story. It will also no doubt hold good that if one is to win a \$300 prize one must write a \$300 story.

Soon after the announcements were made I examined in the same day three stories, intended for entry in one or the other of these contests. The author of the first had devoted perhaps three hours to composing and copying her story. She was apparently an educated woman, and there were no grammatical errors or defects of style. But in more than one instance words necessary to the sense had been omitted. The writer had

not given her copy as careful thought as a courteous business man gives his brief note, requesting or declining an interview. Yet she hoped to receive between \$300 and \$2,500 for her manuscript.

Another writer had carefully revised his work, but he had action that savored of the 15th century and a 20th century setting, and he had a legal discrepancy which would have attracted the notice of a bright lad of fifteen. Yet his letter stated that he was determined to win in a contest for \$2500.

Another writer had a story built upon the firm foundation of one of Victor Hugo's situations. His style was not so strong as the plot. But he said he meant to submit his manuscript in a contest for \$2500.

The contributors who fail to win, not only prizes of large sums of money but even acceptances may, usually, attribute their disappointments to one of two causes: either they have nothing to say or they do not know how to express themselves. The first class seems hopeless. Of the second class some fail simply because of lack of early training. They have thoughts well worth passing on, but their work is crude, unpleasing in its general effect. They cannot punctuate or paragraph a story. Quotation marks puzzle them. They do not, of course, understand the construction of a story. These with patience and hard work can overcome every one of the obstacles in the way of their desire. Those with the early training need practice; just constant, steady, intelligent work.

Some writers fail through lack of confidence. It is an excellent thing to invite criticism; it is a very foolish thing to let a bit of adverse comment destroy your confidence in your carefully planned and executed story. Again and again I am asked: "Do you think I shall ever make a writer?" And sometimes my correspondent adds: "If you say my manuscript shows no talent I will never write another story." Now what critic is infallible? I wonder what boss carpenter in the country could convince the young fellow repairing window ledges across the court that his joinings are bad! The man evidently knows his trade and he's working away and whistling as though failure were an impossibility. He knows he's worth his six dollars a day.

Some years ago I examined a story depicting a happy-hearted Swedish girl. As my Swedish acquaintance was limited to one serious old man and a hard-working young mother I wondered if the author had drawn her girl from life, and I asked her if she was familiar with the Swedish characteristics. I meant merely to put her on her guard in case she had been giving too free rein to her imagination. The Editor had been offering small prizes to the persons sending in the three best stories during a month, and the Swedish story won a prize. In acknowledging our letter the author said she had been astonished at her success, as she had been completely discouraged by our question. She said she had been brought up with Swedish children and had been more or less closely connected with Swedes

all her life. She added that she had intended to put her story away and not submit it to any publication. Imagine a tinsmith discarding his "job" because some fellow mechanic asked him if he was sure galvanized iron leaders were better than tin!

Some writers fail through over-confidence. They will not learn by other writers' failures and successes. They believe that rules are for plodders, not for the talented folks. They feel that the editors are in league against them and that there is nothing to be gained by raising the standard of their work. One of these stepped into my office one day and offered me a printed sheet. He said it contained a poem of his and the price was fifteen cents. A member of our office force asked him why he did not send his poem to the magazines.

"The magazines!" exclaimed the man indignantly. "No magazine will take a manuscript from an unknown writer!"

We were tempted into citing instances of writers who without any influence whatever had sold stories or poems to good magazines. "I sold a story for \$60 when not an editor in the country had ever heard my name mentioned," declared one woman.

The author seemed half-convinced. Then he burst out excitedly: "But I have a poem here which no editor will touch! I sent it to all the good magazines and they returned it. And yet when I gave it to a young lady friend to read she said, 'Oh, how sweet!'" He looked at us triumphantly. "And I couldn't sell it!"

He waited, evidently expecting that one of us would buy the poem on the young lady's recommendation, but no one cared to risk the fifteen cents.

The man appeared to be a gentleman. He was well-dressed and cultured in his manner. He was certainly a man of some education. Yet he was willing to take the opinion of this one young girl who thought his poem sweet against that of the editors of the best magazines in the country.

Another of these over-confident writers with a grudge against the editors once wrote me a letter, explaining his views. He said he couldn't sell his manuscripts, but he had a much better income than the editors who rejected his offerings and he could afford to regard their unjust decisions with complacency. Now what has my correspondent's income as a manufacturer to do with the merit of his story or the judgment of the editors? Because a man can produce a \$100 typewriter it doesn't follow that he can write a \$100 story. I suspect that my author sent his manuscript to a certain magazine because he wanted to see his story under his name on that magazine's pages; the question of whether his story would increase the value of the magazine did not so much concern him. I wonder if he'd let the editor work on his typewriters because the man liked the smell of a machine shop or wanted to boast to his friends that he could "hold down a job" as a mechanic!

This resentment against the editors seems almost fatal. And it's unjust. At the beginning of

my business life I worked in an editorial office, and one of my duties was sending back rejected manuscripts. There was a contest going on, my particular editor having offered \$200 for a short sketch discussing some clever way out of a difficulty that had seemed to the writer hopeless. I ventured to enter the contest and I did hope my manuscript would win an acceptance if not a prize. Of course I signed a fictitious name. To my joy my sketch was held over for a second reading. Then one day I found it in a drawer usually given up to condemned manuscripts. There was just a shadow of doubt as to the editor's intention, and I gave myself the benefit of it. Picking up my own manuscript I asked timidly, "Are these to be sent back?"

The editor glanced at his mark on my envelope and then ran over the first page of the story. A half-tender smile flashed across his lean face. "Yes," he said; "it was a bright little sketch too!"

After that when I wrote more pretentious things and they came back I used to comfort myself by conjuring up visions of the editors smiling tenderly at my manuscripts before they rejected them.

I was once in an office with a woman who would make the most scathing criticisms of her helpers. When one of them grew indignant or burst into sore-hearted weeping she would hasten to assure the girl that she entertained the kindest feelings toward her and chide her gently for taking the fault-finding as "a personal matter." It grew to be a standing joke in the office that

no trouble need cause one pain if it were only not looked upon as "a personal matter." But our lady employer was correct in her reasoning if not very tactful in her methods. A craftsman should never resent just criticism of his work. If the authors would remember that the rejection of a manuscript is never a personal matter with the editor they would suffer less and learn more from their rejections.

I like the writers who can pick themselves up after a tumble and go pluckily on, perhaps laughing a bit at the spectacle they may have made. A fellow-critic once told a patron that he would be glad to know her story would never appear in print. I did not read the manuscript, but I imagine it was a little off-color or else unduly depressing in its teachings. Not long afterwards I was opening the mail when a small envelope dropped from a letter. On it in Latin were the words, "Rest in Peace." I attached no importance to the inscription and opened the envelope, expecting to find a stamp. Instead some fine grey ashes dropped into my lap. Then I read the accompanying letter. The writer said that she had wished to set her critic's mind at rest and so had cremated her manuscript and sent him the remains.

Another man sent us a story entitled, "Just As I Am." After reading our adverse criticism he sent in some more stories with this comment: "I have changed the title of my first manuscript to 'Just As I Ain't,' and it has now gone to accelerate the speed of the kitchen fire."

When I find an author who is glad to be shown his defects but who declares that no amount of adverse criticism can induce him to stop trying I have a deep respect for him. He has in him two elements of success. It seems to me a writer should so love his work that he would go on writing if he knew that his literary efforts would never bring him a word of praise or a cent of money. But it is this very love that has meant success. I do not wonder at the holding power of Stevenson's stories when I think of his, "I would refuse the gift of life without my art."

If you have nothing to say give up the idea of the prize—and the acceptance. If you have something to say do not be held back by such surmountable obstacles as punctuation, paragraphing, construction and the principles of style. But remember that slovenly, amateurish work cannot win a prize or an acceptance away from persons who think no detail too small to be considered and who are bending every carefully trained power toward defeating you.

Writing for publication is a business. It's not a perfectly easy matter to succeed in business, and yet be handicapped by what the practical man kindly calls "the artistic temperament." Yet without the artistic temperament—the power to dream, the quick imagination, the keen sympathy and sensibility of the artist—it is hardly possible to produce the sort of writing which we dignify by the name of literature. The writer with good common sense, therefore, will try to maintain a balance between his business intelligence and his

artistic nature. He must not be so bent upon sales that the artist in him is dwarfed or thwarted; he must not be so completely the artist that he loses his business sense.

The best I have, but a best produced with a view to meeting the market: this should be the writer's guiding principle in the business of writing for publication.

Don't quarrel with the editors. You can't get along without them unless you are willing to adopt the plan of the man with the "sweet" poem.

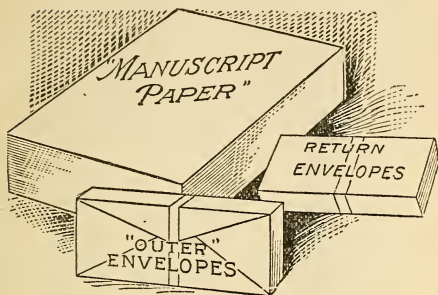
You remember how Mrs. Crupp used to comfort David Copperfield by saying: "Cheer up, Mr. Copperfull! I'm a mother myself." The editor has a fellow feeling for you, whether you know it or not. Very often he's submitting manuscripts to other editors in the regular way; and he doesn't always get checks in return for them either. Cheer up! He's a writer himself.

Let us give the loved little shop a fresh coat of paint and buy some new fixtures and see that the good outdoor air and the sunlight can get in. Let us study our competitor's window and the new catalogues and find out what's "doing" in the business world of which we are a part.

Of course we're going to succeed eventually, but there's no use delaying the day by loafing and moaning. Let's not fail for lack of trying any way. And, listen! The customers won't be scared away by seeing the light of courage on our face and hearing us whistling joyously as we work.

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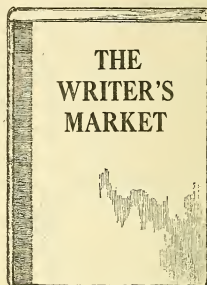
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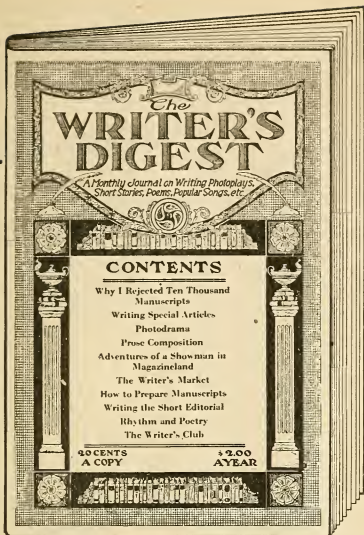
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Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases

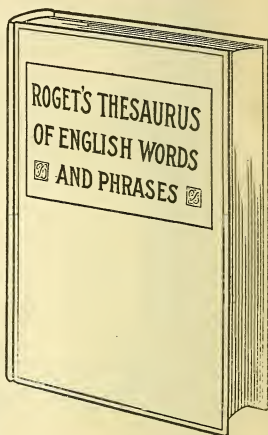
BY PETER MARK ROGET.

This is a book that everybody needs. It is just as indispensable to every home as a dictionary, and certainly no author can afford to be without it. The purpose of a dictionary is merely to explain the meaning of words, the word being given to find the idea it is intended to convey. The object of the THESAURUS is exactly the opposite of this; the *idea* being given, to find the word or phrase by which that idea may be most fitly and aptly expressed. As one has well said: "*It gives you the word or phrase you want when that word or phrase is on the tip of your tongue but altogether beyond your reach.*"

Let us illustrate its use: Suppose that in our story we write, "John faced the men unflinchingly and spoke to them in words of decision. His meaning was clear . . ." We stop. The word "clear" is not just the word we want to use. We open our THESAURUS and turn to the word "clear." There we find "intelligible, lucid, explicit, expressive, significant, distinct, precise, definite, well-defined, perspicuous, transpicuous, plain, obvious, manifest, palpable, striking, glaring, transparent, aboveboard, unshaded, recognizable, unambiguous, unequivocal, unmistakable, legible, open, positive, unconfused, graphic." See what a field of expression we have at our command. The synonyms of every word and expression are given in this manner.

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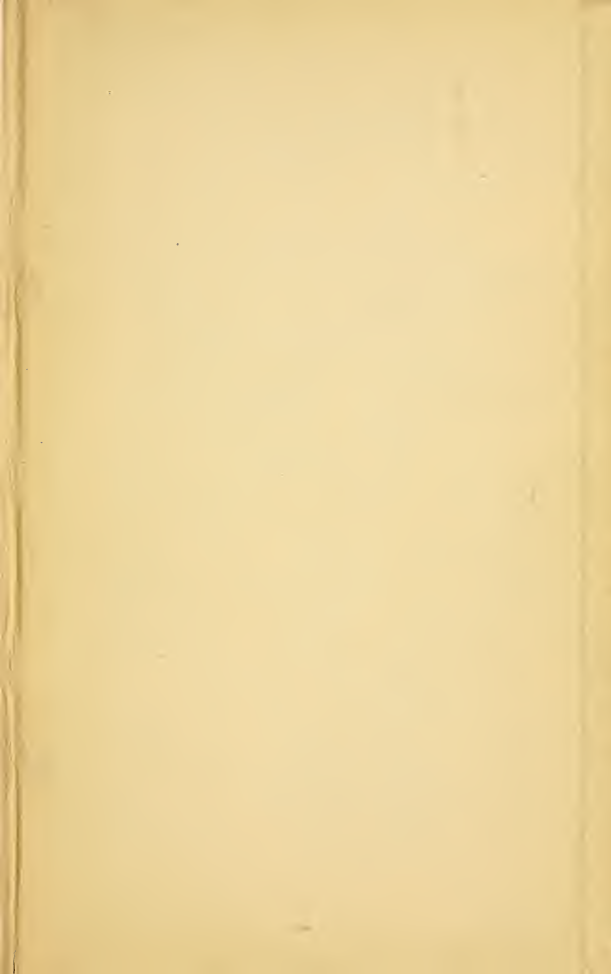


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